Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

Newsletter **Volume 32:2 March 2021**

Message from the President

Dear Friends,

The great news is that March 2021 is here! Our plants are beginning to emerge once again now that the snowmen have melted, and the blooms that promised to burst open prior to the whiteout are doing so. The coldest months of the winter are behind us.

The bad news is that we cannot say that about COVID19, and that means that we have to continue to practice responsible restraint in our day to day lifestyles. We can expect that we will continue to meet by means of Zoom from our homes for some time yet.

And the very sad news is that we again, suddenly and unexpectedly, have lost a very dear friend in our Rhododendron community. Paul Wurz will be deeply missed. We extend deepest condolences to his family and close friends during this very difficult period of loss and grieving.

In this issue, we feature some stunning companion plants, for both above and below our rhododendrons.

Let us all continue to do our best to *"be kind, be calm, and be safe"*

Verna

CVRS March Presentation
Wednesday, March 3, 7pm
Zoom Meeting

"Propagation of Rhododendrons and Grafting of Maples and Conifers"
(More details on page 4)

In This Issue:

With Much Sadness

We sadly acknowledge the passing of a dear friend in our Rhododendron community, February 20, 2021

Paul Wurz

Of Hidden Acres in Campbell River passed away unexpectedly in his sleep Friday night.

He will be deeply missed by friends and family and the entire Vancouver Island Rhododendron community.

Paul was well-known and valued by Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society members. He participated often in the CVRS Garden Fair as a vendor presenting his unique selection of Lofthouse rhododendron hybrids.

His garden, Hidden Acres has the largest collection of rhododendron hybrids created by Vancouver's Jack Lofthouse in the world. Jack G. Lofthouse (1915 –

2005) passed his work of over 50 hybrids to Paul Wurz, who then created a Living Library of the Lofthouse Rhododendron Legacy.

In October 2016, as Guest Speaker at the CVRS meeting, Paul introduced the CVRS community to both the Lofthouse hybrids and the hybridizer of the many favourite rhododendrons brightening West Coast gardens.

A former teacher, Paul Wurz explained his mission was ". . .to make as many of the new and specialty rhododendrons available to rhodo fanatics as possible." At Hidden Acres, at one point, Paul and Lynn propagated approximately 1500 young rhodos each year and welcomed guests to visit their display garden of approximately 1000 hybrids and species rhododendrons, under planted with a variety of hostas, ferns and other companion plants.

In February 2020, just one year ago, Paul served on a CVRS Expert Panel evening, freely sharing his knowledge of propagating, and his experience and expertise in growing rhododendrons. The audience expressed that the panel's offering that evening had been outstanding, quite possibly the 'best ever'. Members delighted in the humour and left with a great deal of applicable knowledge. That evening with Paul Wurz will remain a treasured memory for his friends in the Cowichan Valley.

CVRS Guest Speaker

Rosemary Prufer

Wednesday, March 3, 2021 7pm

"Propagation of Rhododendrons and Grafting of Maples and Conifers"

Rosemary's passion for plants started at a young age in North Vancouver. After working at several jobs, she realized that working with plants was something she needed to focus on. In 1995 she completed the Horticulture program at B.C.I.T. and never looked back.

Her first job came as a custom propagator of Rhododendrons in Maple Ridge. The owner Lloyd Smith had decades of experience with propagation under his belt and taught Rosemary so much, including the grafting of Maples and conifers.

Years of taking various courses, including Floral design to stay viable and up to date with modern horticulture, kept Rosemary busy.

Until recently, Rosemary was a member of the IPPS which is the International Plant Propagators Society Western Chapter, an organization that allowed professionals to visit various nurseries and exchange information and experiences.

Rosemary has also been a member of the ARS for over thirty years. She has been an active member in several chapters and has taken on every position except for treasurer. Participating in plant sales and giving the occasional talks and demos has helped her learn much and make many wonderful friends.

Rosemary's husband, Art, is almost always at her side helping with plants sales, games, etc. even though he describes himself as a '*dragee'.* Art's background in the IT industry has helped Rosemary set up newsletters, and slideshows for the Rhododendron clubs.

Retired now, Rosemary loves sharing her knowledge and experiences with other folks who are like minded.

With Sadness

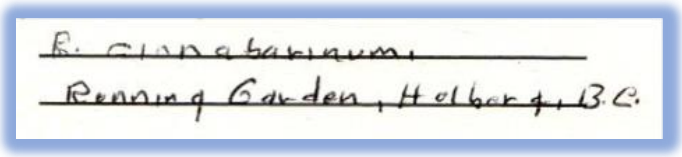
"Fellow Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society members have inquired about Jim Crawford. After contacting a couple of other Rhododendron societies with which Jim Crawford was involved, I have regretfully learned that Jim died in June 2019, at the age of 90."

Alan Campbell

An article about Jim Crawford was featured in the *Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society Newsletter* Volume 28:1 February 2017:

W. James Crawford

A Passion for Rhododendrons and Art



W. James Crawford [was] a long-time member of the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society. Jim Crawford [was] a life member of the Rhododendron Species Foundation, and the American Rhododendron Society. Unfortunately, because he [lived] on Saltspring Island, very few of the members of the CVRS have actually had the pleasure of meeting, and getting to know, this very talented gentleman.

He was born in Victoria in 1928, grew up on Saltspring Island, and thanks to a 'green thumb gardener mother, inherited an interest in native plants.

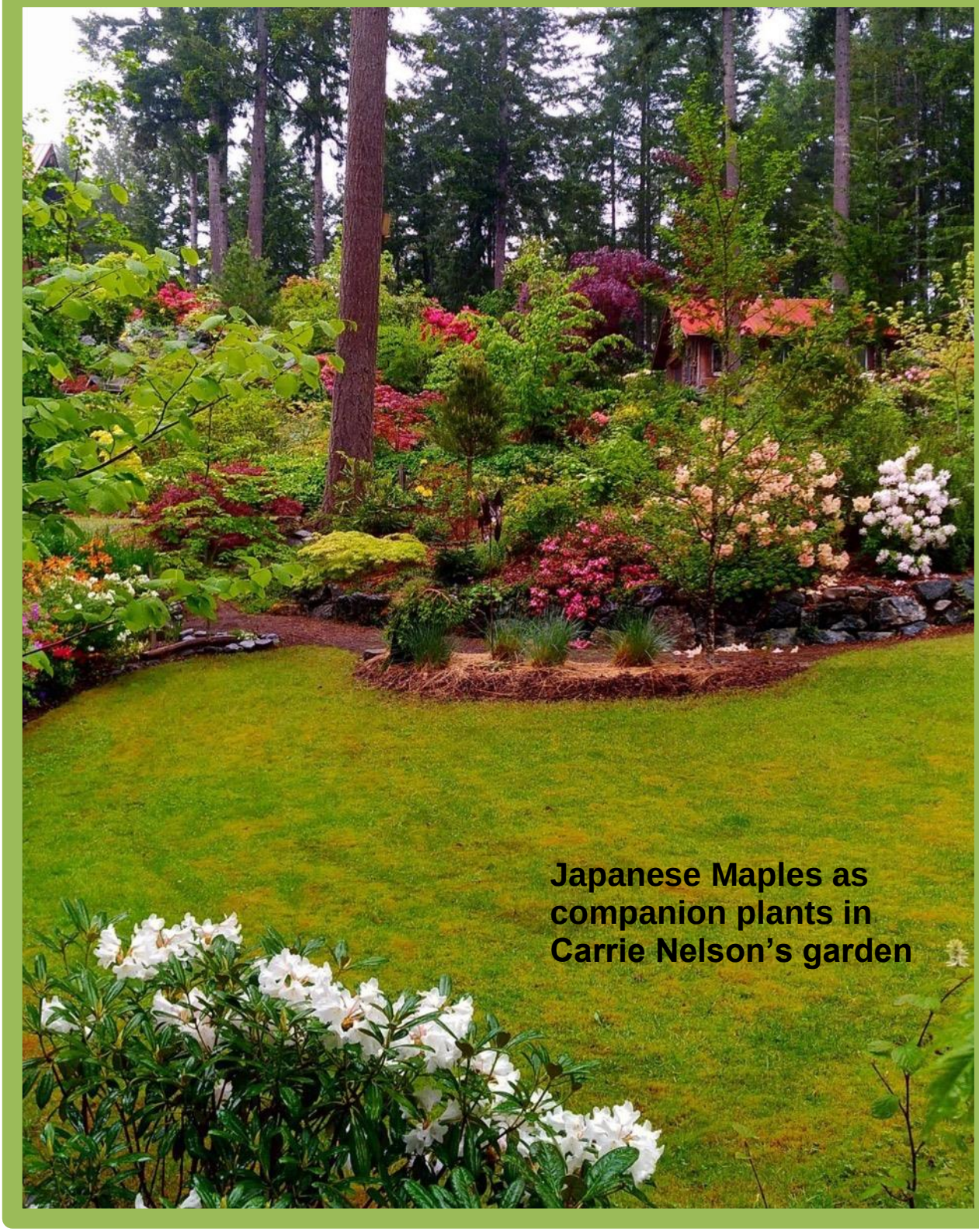
Jim taught technical drawing at Tacoma Community College. He spent twenty summers on mineral exploration programs in the Arctic, where he developed a keen interest in wildflowers and nature photography.

Upon retiring in 1991, Jim took a drawing class with botanical illustrator Louise M. smith, at the Rhododendron Species Foundation. Here, he found the patience and perseverance skills of technical drawing readily applicable to botanical illustration. He joined Val Konig's watercolour class in 2001.

A Beginner's Guide to Japanese Maples

Submitted by Carrie Nelson

Photos by Carrie Nelson unless otherwise indicated



Japanese Maples as companion plants in Carrie Nelson's garden

Japanese Maples are good companions in a rhododendron garden;

they have similar soil and moisture needs, and taller varieties can provide shade for less sun tolerant rhododendrons.

Equally importantly, Japanese Maples complement the rhododendron garden year-round; their changeable leaves and diminutive flowers add variable textures and interest from early Spring through Summer; their leaves and winged fruit add outstanding colour to an otherwise green canvas in the Fall; and being relatively small deciduous trees, they add structural interest to the Winter garden.

In this article, I will provide general information about considerations in making a selection, planting, and care of Japanese Maples and I will share some specifics about three of many of my favourites.

I encourage you to do your own research prior to purchasing. I have provided a few on-line resources that I find reliable for descriptions and photos.

TAXONOMY:

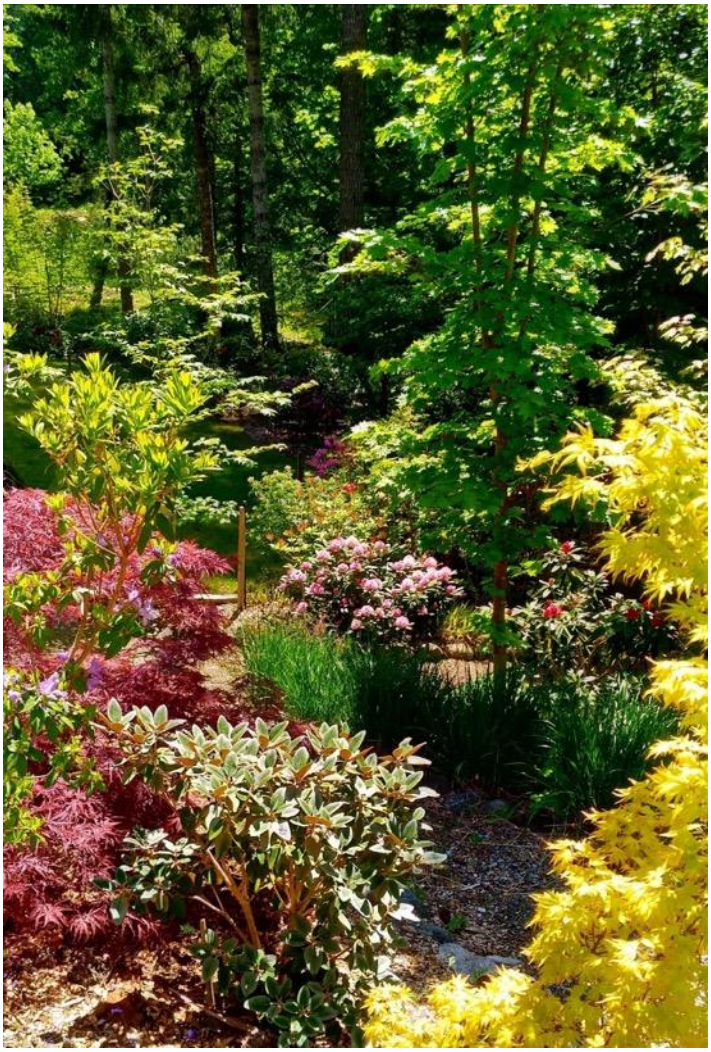
Phylum: Spermatophyta (seed bearing)
Subphylum: Angiospermae (flowering plants or having covered seed)
Class: Dicotyledonae (emerges from seed with 2 leaves)
Order: Sapindales (stamens are inserted on a disk and the ovary with 1 or 2 ovules in each cell [Merriam-Webster Dictionary])
Family: Aceraceae
Genus: Acer
Species: *Acer palmatum (*Palmatum*), Acer japonicum (*Japonicum*), and Acer shirisawanum*

Note:

As with many plants, classification can be controversial and a changeable nightmare. I am not an expert, so I offer that as my excuse should you find error. I try to check several research sites prior to making grand statements.

If interested:

***Maplessociety.org* provides further classification into 17 groups, primarily using leaf and bark characteristics. This may be where taxonomists and experts cringe, as I have observed on the UBC Botanical Garden forums**



***ACER PALMATUM*:**

Acer palmatum is the scientific name for what we tend to know as "*Japanese* Maples." *Acer palmatum* are native to Japan, Korea, China, Mongolia and south eastern Russia. The species *A. japonicum* and *A. shirisawanum* are native to Japan. *Acer palmatum* have been cultivated in Japan starting around 1640 and in the UK around 1820. Now they are cultivated and thrive in temperate climates (Zone 5 – 8) around the world. An estimate of 1000 cultivars exist at this time and ongoing breeding programs and natural selection will ensure future varieties for avid collectors. From here on, I will use the common name, Japanese Maples, to represent all three species unless I am referring to a specific species or cultivar.

FORM and ORIENTATION:

Japanese Maple cultivars can take an upright, vase, weeping, dwarf or creeping form and range in height from 30 cm (1 ft) to 8 metres (25 ft) and widths of equal lengths. Choose the form that best suits your landscape and that which compliments the textures and colours of other flora in your garden. Variation in plant height, colour, and texture encourages the human eye to explore the whole garden. Choose your tree depending on rate of growth, the potential canopy in 10 years, the size of leaf, the direction of the prevailing wind, sun/shade, site drainage and available water. Japanese Maples are considered understory trees or shrubs, but many perform best in full sun with some protection from hot afternoon sun and drying winds. They can suffer breakage from strong winds and heavy snow. Hardiness is generally Zones 5 – 8.

PLANTING:

Roots are relatively shallow and spread to the width of the canopy. Prepare a planting hole that is 2-4 times the width of the root ball and about 10-15 cm (4-6 in) deeper than the pot. Acers are susceptible to root rot so ensure the hole drains readily. Avoid areas of heavy clay and standing water. Fill the hole and drain before filling with the soil mix. Gently tease roots out before planting. Plant the tree to the same level as it was in the pot or slightly higher. Leave the graft exposed. Water deeply and regularly (with a hose, not overhead sprinkler) for the first year and water consistently and deeply thereafter, preferably with a drip system. Top dress with 5 cm (2 in) of mulch to protect the roots from extreme temperature fluctuation, and moisture loss. Japanese Maples rarely need fertilizer; however, observe the overall tree health

and, if necessary, lightly top dress with compost, or sparingly apply *slow release* Osmocote, inside the drip line in April/May, and water into the mulch.

Dwarf and weeping varieties are suited to container culture. Given the root structure of Japanese Maples, pots can be quite shallow, wider at the top with no inward curve and they must drain well. Do not have the pot in a tray; instead raise a pot up on blocks to prevent root rot. Almost any variety can be grown as a bonsai. Soil amendment and root pruning will be necessary about every 3 years.

SOIL:

Well drained, high organic matter, on the acidic side is best. Mix 3 parts good potting soil with 2 parts fir or pine bark and 1 part pumice or perlite. Incorporating *mycorrhizae* into the mix will assist new root growth. Chicken and cow manure and/or commercial fertilizer high in nitrogen added to the soil mix is NOT recommended as it can burn the roots, which in turn will burn the leaves. Nitrogen creates rapid excessive growth. A slow growing tree will have a better overall shape than one fed on steroids. The better the soil conditions, the better Japanese Maples can withstand other poor growing conditions such as wind, water-related problems, heat stress, insect pests, and diseases.

LEAVES:

Swedish doctor-botanist Carl Peter Thunberg gave the species the name 'palmatum' after the hand-like shape of its leaves. This would barely surprise the Japanese who for centuries referred to their group of maples as *kaede* and *momiji*, references to the "hands" of frogs and babies, respectively." (https://www.healthbenefitstimes.com/japanese-maple/)

Japanese Maple leaves are 2 – 5 inches long and wide, with exceptions, and are 5 – 9 lobed.

Leaves can be described as:

- *palmate* or hand-like as those of *Acer shirasawanum*;
- *palmately compound* where the lobes emerge from the base of the leaf closest to the petiole such as *Acer japonicum aconitifolium;*
- *dissectum,* deeply cut or finely dissected lobes of *Acer palmatum dissectum* 'Waterfall';
- *linearilobum,* with thread-like leaves *Acer palmatum* 'Koto-no-ito'.

Leaf colour will vary depending on the season and growing conditions. Variegated leaves tend to need more shade, or they suffer sun scorch.

Photo of *dissectum* vs *linearilobum*
(url: Encyclopedia of Britannica,

FLOWERS:

The species is *monoecious*, having both male and female flowers on the same plant. Flowers emerge in April to May, green to red in colour; although diminutive they are quite attractive, especially the reds on the bright green leaf types.

FRUIT/SEEDS:

The *samara* (a seed with 2 wings) is green ripening to yellow, brown or red in September to October. Red samaras stand out best against the dark foliage of such varieties as *Acer shirasawanum* 'Yasemin' (aka *Acer palmatum* 'Yasemin', depending on source) and *Acer palmatum* 'Trompenburg'. They persist well into the Fall in an upright manner above the leaves on these varieties.

STEMS:

Stems are *glabrous* (smooth); they can be bright green, purple, red or like 'Sango Kaku', coral in colour. Older trunks can maintain their green or turn grey and develop more mottled and textured bark.

PRUNING:

For the most part, I recommend planting a 1-2-gallon size tree and letting it grow freely for the first five years before pruning. Acers grow quickly in the early years if planted in a suitable medium.

Some sites suggest pruning during Winter dormancy; however, other sites, and I concur from experience, that summer is the best time to prune. In winter, limbs are brittle and do not prune cleanly, and the sap may run, potentially causing a point of entry for disease. Also, severe pruning and tip pruning in winter will stimulate vigorous growth come Spring, which will mean more pruning is required. In summer, use sterilized by-pass pruners for smaller branches. For branches larger than 2 cm (1 in) in diameter, cut the branch off about 4 – 6 inches from the trunk with loppers or a pruning saw, then prune the stub back to the collar to avoid stripping the bark.

Remove dead and crossing branches in the Summer and to show off the interesting trunk shapes. Stand back, assess, then prune for shape.

"Niwaki" is a Japanese method of training trees into shapes resembling clouds. The style is said to depict the distilled essence of the tree and can become a focal point in the garden. (https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=540)

WATERING:

Soaker hoses or drip lines are best. One inch of rain per week will sustain most gardens through the dry months. Use soaker hoses or drip lines to achieve this and avoid overhead watering unless it is done in the wee hours of the morning.

DISEASES/PESTS:

Good soil, drainage and ventilation will ensure a healthy tree and prevent most diseases and pest problems. Japanese Maples can be susceptible to scale; watch carefully and remove as soon as possible.

Verticillium wilt, soil-based bacteria, may show up all of a sudden and by then most of the damage is done to the tree and will likely kill it. Any branches with wilt can be pruned back significantly and burned. Any further sign of wilt usually means the demise of the tree so remove it altogether and burn it. Do not plant anything in its place for a few years. Sterilize tools.

Although deer are not a disease, they can set back young trees. I find the more acidic finely dissected leaves repel deer after they've taken a sample. The larger palmate leaves are a bit tastier. Protect with netting or fencing or deer repellent until the tree out grows the browsing level.

PROPAGATION:

By Seed:
Collect when ripe in September and October. Sow in situ or in pots of loamy potting soil; keep moist and place in a protected spot outside or in a cool greenhouse. Seeds seldom come true but often you can get pleasant surprises in leaf shape and colour.

By Cuttings:
Take softwood cuttings in summer between June 15 and July 15. Softwood cuttings should be 6 – 8 inches in length and about 1/4 – 3/8 in diameter. Cut the base at a 45-degree angle. Leave cutting in a 0.5% rooting hormone solution for 1 minute. Use a sterilized starter mix at least 6-8 inches deep; stick 1/2 the cutting into the soil. Press firmly and water. Place outside where the cuttings will get morning sun and afternoon shade. Mist daily. Water only if the top 5 cm (2 in) feels dry. Cuttings should root in 5 – 6 weeks. Leave in pots for 2 months, then pot on and protect in a greenhouse through the winter until after the last frost. Grow on in a pot or plant directly in garden.

NOTE:
Japanese Maples from cuttings may be inferior to grafted cultivars possibly due to a less vigorous root system; however, I have had some success. Plants grown from cuttings make ideal bonsai specimens.

By Grafting:
Use 1-2 year-old cultivar scions with 4-6 leaf nodes including the tip growth to graft onto 2-3 year old Acer Palmatum root stock that is cut anywhere from 15-30cm (6-22 inches) in height.
(JapaneseMaples@PacificCoastMaples.com)

By Simple Layering:
Refer to:
https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=358 or *How to Propagate: Techniques and Tips for 1000 Plants* by John Cushnie, 2006, page 68.
Roots should develop within 12 months.

By Air Layering:
According to a UBC blog some *Acer palmatums* are easy to air root using moistened spaghnum moss/peat mix wrapped around a wounded branch 6mm-25mm (3/8in-1 in) with hormone applied and covered with plastic. I will try it and let you know. (botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/threads/air-layering-acer-palmatum.98989/page 2)

MY GARDEN FAVOURITES (today):

Acer japonicum aconitifolium

Common names: Fernleaf Full Moon Maple and Dancing Peacock.

Considered a slow growing mounding dwarf tree with ascending branches.

Large green, deeply dissected leaves (5 – 7 in. long and 5 in. wide)

Magnificent Fall colours of red, purple, yellow and orange when situated in full sun.

Grows to 2.5m (8-10 ft) high and 1.8m wide.

The flowers are red and emerge just ahead of, or with, the Spring foliage.

Zone 5 – 7

Prefers full sun to part shade. The more sun, the better Fall colour but prefers cooler summers, hence, the Zone 7 rating.

The maples provide a dapple of shade for smaller rhododendrons.

Acer palmatum dissectum ‘Waterfall’

I think this the best weeping green leaf dissected form with 7 – 9 finely dissected feathery lobes. Leaves are 3 – 5 in long and wide. Low and slow growing, horizontal to pendular branches, 2 – 3 feet tall by 6 feet wide in 10 years.

Completely sun tolerant and does not seem to suffer from insufficient water (from my experience).

‘Waterfall’ is great in rockeries and pots and its twisty trunk provides winter interest.

The Fall colours are orange and yellow and tinges of red.

Acer palmatum
'Orange Dream'

(My description differs from on-line sources)

- Small upright tree.
- Grows to 2.1m high and 1.2m wide.
- Provides a lovely bright spot as an understory tree among rhododendrons or in contrast with the dark reds and purple Japanese Maples.
- Ideal for semi shady site.
- Protect from hot afternoon sun.

In Spring: Foliage opens a bright yellow-green with a thin red edge.

In Summer: It fades to green in Summer

In Fall: Leaves turn yellow-gold with pinks and red highlights in the Fall.

'Orange Dream' on the right of each frame (with *R. augustinii* 'Eleanor' and *Acer palmatum* 'Red Dragon' in the back

***Acer palmatum* 'Orange Dream' - Spring leaves (left) and Fall leaves (right)**

CONCLUSION:

Japanese Maples are relatively easy to grow and are well suited to the West Coast climate. They add colour and interesting texture to any garden. I highly recommend researching what will work in your landscape, keeping drainage front and center in your plans. Before purchasing, note the seasonal leaf colours and growing habits in order to complement what else is growing in the garden.

Further Information:

If you are interested in Japanese Gardens specifically, U. of Victoria Continuing Studies is offering an on-line course:

Gardens in History: Japanese Gardens, 3 sessions, April 7 – 21, 2021 from 2 – 4 pm. (**continuingstudies.uvic.ca** or call 250-472-4747 to register).

Resources:

dinternursery.ca
Dinter's Nursery, Duncan, BC – a retail nursery providing an extensive selection of Japanese Maples with descriptions on their website. It sells from 1 - 25-gallon sizes and delivers locally.

pacificnorthwestplants.ca
Pacific Northwest Propagators (PNWP) -- a wholesale nursery in Rosedale, BC. Although it is wholesale, you can view the list of over 350 cultivars, divided by species, on their website. Informative site for plant descriptions.

outbacknursery.ca
Outback Nursery Headquarters Rd., Courtney BC. Good selection of Japanese Maples. Website under construction.

mendocinomaples.com
Mendocino Maples Nursery (California info) A great site for photos and helpful hints.

References:

JapaneseMaples@PacificCoastMaples.com Temacula CA – Info on grafting.

Dirr, Michael A. 1975, revised 1998. *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants, Their Identification, Ornamental Characteristics, Culture, Propagation and Uses.* Stipes Publishing L.L.C., Champaign, Illinois.

Brickell, Christopher; Cole, Trevor, 2004. *A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants,* Canadian Edition, Dorling Kindersley Limited, represented in Canada by Tourmaline Editions Inc.

https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=358 for Air Layering. Cushnie, John. 2006. *How to Propagate, techniques and tips for 1000 plants* by John Cushnie. Kyle Cathie Limited, page 68.

forums.botanicalgardens.ubc.ca

De Langhe Jan & Crowley, Dan. 2015-2018. Ghent University Botanical Garden in partnership with Westonbirt The National Arboretum – *Vegetative Identification Key to Species in Cultivation.*

www.botanicalgardens.ubc.ca, then search forums: Japanese Maples

Vertrees, J.D. & Gregory, Peter, (I believe the latest publication is 2007) *Timber Press Guide to Japanese Maples.* Timber Press, Portland Oregon.

RED LIST/THREATENED

Rhododendron Species

One species of rhododendron, *Rhododendron kanehirai,* would be extinct if were not for collections made by botanic gardens.

Rhododendron kanehirai
Photo source: Hirsutum

"Extinct in the Wild taxon with wild-source material 'in cultivation' in 2017 (average 6.0 BGCI records per taxon)"

For more information on Red List or threatened rhododendrons:

MacKay MB[1], Hootman SE[2], Smith GF[3], Thomson D[4], Gardiner SE[5], Smith P[6]. 2018. *Updated global analysis for ex situ conservation of Rhododendron L. (Ericaceae). Report to Botanic Gardens International, January 2018*. Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand, and Botanic Gardens Conservation International, Richmond, UK.

Also, a presentation you do not want to miss, in May 2020:

District 1 has arranged for a presentation by one of the authors of the above Report to speak on conservation of endangered rhododendrons: Marion Mackay, Massey University, New Zealand: *The New Zealand ex situ Rhododendron Conservation Project*

BLOOMING WINTER GARDENS

Early Blooming *Rhododendrons* and feisty companion plants prove their courage in CVRS member gardens. . .

***Rhododendron* 'Bodega Crystal Pink'**

Blooming pale pink now in Ali Morris's garden and Joe Hudak's container

Parentage: *R.* 'Cilpinense' x *mucronulatum* 'Cornell Pink'

In bud now, but opening a little later is one of the family, *Rhododendron* 'Cilpinense', *R. ciliatum x moupinense* (Above)

***Rhododendron moupinense* in Carrie Nelson's garden displays its rosy buds**

Proudly displayed in their supporting roles, a broad stand of *Epimedium* stars at U of Vic (Photo: Trisha Guiget) **and *Calluna vulgaris* 'Zoe', in lieu of flowering, demands attention with its coral foliage in George's garden**

Companion Plant of the Month

By Ali Morris

For me, the best companion plant in March is the Hellebore.

This plant provides a long lasting show, often presenting its blooms in early February.

They are easy to grow, if planted well, and drought resistant after a year or two. A bonus for most of us is that they are also deer and rabbit resistant. I fertilize after blooming to ensure next year's blooms.

The most common variety found in nurseries is *Helleborus orientalis.* Many of the new releases have double flowers. *Helleborus orientalis,* or Lenton Rose, bears nodding or outward-facing, saucer-shaped, flowers, in white, pink, green, primrose, mauve or smoky purple, from February onwards.

One group that sells under the name of Ericsmithii has exceptional foliage. The flowers are beautiful too; however, these plants are sterile. *Helleborus x ericsmithii* is a hybrid between *H. x sternii* and *H. niger*.

Interestingly and importantly, it is advisable **not** to divide your plants as they are very susceptible to a fungus infection. Cleaning up foliage in spring reduces fungus spread. Hellebores seed freely, but as they are hybrids, will generally not come true to the parent plant. Seedlings will start to bloom in a few years, and most are a dusty pink. Therefore, if you are looking for a specific colour, purchasing from a nursery is the way to go.

I have been collecting these plants for 25 years; even if I control my greed and only purchase 3 or 4 every year, my garden – well, you can do the math!

Left: This is a white seedling; the mother plant came from Heronswood Nursery in Washington State. The plant produced many beautiful offspring; some are double, but not all.

Center: *H.* 'Cotton Candy' This is a favourite of mine, very healthy with outfacing flowers.

Right: *H.* 'Purple Mystique' I grow this one in a pot; it gives me early colour at my front door

HELLEBORES

Rhododendron Companion Champions*

Verna Buhler

It is sometimes difficult to believe that Hellebores are not simply wishful thinking and figments of my imagination. As I wander through the garden in the harsh season, I find myself spellbound by the tough deep-green, open-hand leaves spread spoke-like around a hub of delicate, fragile-looking buds and blooms. On closer inspection, the blooms do not appear delicate at all. Instead, they stand erect and undaunted by pounding rain, hoar-frost, and snow without drooping a shoulder. A warning that "Winter has come" means little to them. Gardeners, living in varied ranges of hardiness zones, find these pleasing stalwarts blooming between November and April.

Naturalized *Helleborus niger*

(*Information for this article is drawn from a number of online sources, including Phoenix Perennials)

Over the past several weeks, I have been cutting away the old, dry, and flattened leaves of Hellebores -- yes, one of the most enjoyable of gardening tasks in January -- all the while wondering about the differences that I note in my collection of Hellebore plants. Why are so many of the Hellebores unnamed? When I pick up a Hellebore plant at a nursery or plant sale, it bothers me that I cannot find a plant name that indicates its variety. I suppose that labelling fetish may be a result of rhododendron collecting passions and attitudes. Always be able to answer the question *"What is it called",* or your gorgeous rhododendron immediately seems to lose some value and significance.

Differences between appearance of *Helleborus* plants in February; the foliage on the two rose-pink plants remains strong and green whereas the foliage of the near black Helleborus leaves were removed because they had died back completely.

While I was cutting back the least attractive of the hellebores leaves, I noticed that the leaves on some plants were flattened but entirely green requiring no leaf removal, while others were no longer green and leaf removal left the stems of blooms stark against the mulch surface. Some of the flowers on other hellebores were perched on stems from which young leaves were emerging while the rest of the plant could be cleared away. Then there were some taller hellebores with greyish leaves and stalks of blooms. When I came across a label, I became excited until I saw an identical label on another plant with flowers of a different colour.

The week of snowfall offered a bit of research time; that bit of research time evolved into hours of fascinating discoveries. Some of the distinctive and confusing differences that I had noted and questioned while in the garden, are exactly what allow for some grouping strategies. Therefore, although still confused, I found the following three broad groupings to be the most helpful. The first is the Christmas Rose or *Helleborus niger* Group; the second, the Snow Rose or Stemmed Hybrid Group; the third, the Lenton Rose, *Helleborus orientalis* or *Helleborus x hybridus* Group.

Research also helped me understand that I wasn't a connoisseur of hellebores, though I thought I had collected quite a variety. What I do have are plants from a variety of series; series such as FrostKiss, the Helleborus Gold Collection, the Ice 'n Roses Series, Royal Heritage Strain, the Lady Series, and the Winter Queen Strain. So, I am apparently an entry level hellebores collector. Apparently, if I had hellebores from series identified as Winter Jewels Onyx Odyssey, Honeymoon and Wedding Party Series, I could say that the series hellebores that I had met extremely high standards, those carefully selected plants derived from meticulous breeding, rather than my more average standard plants. However, it is more complex than that.

Breeders have found that hellebores are complicated. They are seed hybrids of numerous wild species so their genetics are difficult to understand. Hellebores propagate readily from seed but will differ from the parent plants. Propagation by extremely careful pollination methods and selection can ensure some characteristics for special strains and that has been the practice for a number of years. Recently, however, more plants are being produced using micro-propagation or tissue culture methods, making identical copies of unique plants more available on the market; so, if, or when it matters, there will be more opportunity for me to collect the named ones.

To differentiate between hellebores derived from these two different methods of propagation, the correct botanical formatting is used to separate and indicate these two groups of hellebores whenever possible. Seed strains are written without single quotes as in *Helleborus* Mrs. Betty Ranicar or *Helleborus* Winter Jewels Sun Flare. Cultivars produced through tissue culture will have their names surrounded by single quotes as in *Helleborus* 'Tutu' denoting a true cultivar where all plants are uniformly the same. Therefore, it is possible to assume that *Helleborus* 'Rosemary' and *Helleborus* 'Mme Lemmonier' are produced by tissue culture and may, currently, be among the rarer of hybrids available.

Hueger is one of the most renowned of Hellebores breeders. The Heuger family in Germany spent years breeding two features into hellebores to make them much more interesting and valuable in the home garden. One of the sought characteristics was early and long-blooming habit, and the other, flowers held in upright positions so they could be readily seen, rather than in the nodding habit of traditional blooms.

Hellebore varieties that make up Heuger's lovely Gold Collection share a number of outstanding characteristics: They flower the first year with a very long bloom period; they have diverse flowers and foliage; most perform as well in containers as in the ground; they are long-lived; and they can be used as ground covers in shady locations.

***Helleborus niger* 'Josef Lemper' is the largest growing of the HGC Christmas Collection**
Photo: Heuger.com

Of the Helleborus Gold Collections, the HGC **Christmas Collection** has at least fourteen beautiful *Helleborus niger* selections with names beginning with "J", such as the subtly fragrant *Helleborus niger* 'Jacob Classic' and the largest growing *Helleborus niger* 'Josef Lemper' among others. Diverging from the naming pattern, it also offers a beautiful

Helleborus Gold Collection Series are distributed throughout North America by Skagit Horticulture and Gardens in Mount Vernon, Washington. The website offers an intriguing gallery of stunning photos: skagitgardens.com

Helleborus niger **'Snow Frills'** Photo: Heuger.com

Helleborus niger, or Christmas Rose:

The first group then, *Helleborus niger,* also known as the Christmas Rose, is aptly named for the reason that it is the first to reveal its outward-facing, pure white blooms with central clusters of golden yellow stamens in winter, as early as November and December, and now, through hybridization, through into April. It is considered the hardiest, and can reportedly be grown in Zones 4a, Northern Ontario and Alberta, and if protected with mulches, in Zone 3a. The species *Helleborus niger* grows naturally in Switzerland, southern Germany, northern Italy and east to Croatia.

The Stemmed Hybrids or Snow Roses

In recent years, a second new hybrid group has been developed from the *caulescent* or stemmed species from the Mediterranean (*H. lividus* and *H. argutifolius*) crossed with the Christmas rose, *H. niger. Helleborus foetidus* has also been used. These intergeneric hybrids offer leathery leaves on which sit clusters of outward-facing flowers mostly in shades of white, cream, pink, and dusty rose. These hybrids are more tolerant of full sun and also do well in pots or the ground, whereas the Lenten roses prefer part sun to shade and don't enjoy pots beyond a few years.

Helleborus lividus **is an evergreen perennial with blue-green leaves that have conspicuous creamy veins. From mid-winter to mid-spring, it bears clusters of nodding, pink-flushed, pale-green, bowl shaped flowers on red stems.**

Helleborus lividus **has the most limited natural distribution of all hellebores and even in its area of distribution it is very scarce. The island of Majorca is its main home, where it is confined to the mountains along the north east coast; the sites in which it grows are relatively moist compared with surrounding areas.**

The first cultivar to make waves of this new hybrid group was 'Ivory Prince' but more recently, to the delight of gardeners, the Helleborus Gold Collection has introduced many superlative cultivars. Since then, the Lenten roses have been crossed into this stemmed hybrid group as well — a feat previously thought to be impossible — producing outward-facing flowers that sit on top of incredibly mottled

foliage in deep, bold colours, previously found only in *Helleborus* x *hybridus*. These new hybrids are known as the Frostkiss series. Another series also employing this same type of cross is the Ice 'n Roses series. These are huge plants with outward-facing flowers sometimes reaching nearly two feet tall and sitting above very large and very dark green leaves.

These new series are continuing a long tradition of innovation in hellebores that continues to greatly benefit the gardening world.

Helleborus argutifolius, (left photo) the **holly-leaved hellebore**, or **Corsican hellebore**, syn. *H. corsicus*, *H. lividus* subsp. *corsicus*.

H. foetidus (Above right photo) is grown in gardens for its handsome evergreen foliage and large numbers of green, bell-shaped flowers borne in late winter. In spring its almost ferny clumps are joined by clusters of nodding, lime-green flowers held on thick stems just above the tops of the foliage.
It prefers woodland conditions with deep, fertile, moist, humus rich, well-drained soil, and dappled shade. The species is, however, drought-tolerant. It often occurs naturally on chalk or limestone soils. The Royal Horticultural Society has given it its prestigious Award of Garden Merit (AGM).

The Lenten Rose

Helleborus x hybridus **'Amethyst Gem'**

The Lenten rose, *Helleborus* x *hybridus*, is the last group of hellebores to bloom. In coastal BC the buds usually form in late January opening usually in mid to late February. Flowering continues into April and sometimes May. In colder zones the Lenten roses will bloom in early spring after the Christmas and Snow roses. *Helleborus* x *hybridus* is usually listed as zone 5, but many gardeners have been having good success with a good mulch of fallen leaves and good snow cover. Some gardeners are even blooming Lenten roses in zone 3, if they meticulously, and thickly, cover their plants through the winter.

H. x *hybridus* offers the largest colour range and the most diverse flower forms of all hellebores with nearly every colour of the rainbow and single, semi-double, and double forms. Most Lenten roses are grown from seed strains which has the benefit of producing an incredible diversity of flower colours and patterns that are well worth collecting. There are others that are tissue cultured so that every plant is identical.

The Lenten Roses: Strains versus Cultivars

Traditionally every *Helleborus* x *hybridus* offered has been derived from seed strains since hellebores bulk up slowly and resent being divided. Seed strains are carefully bred lines that are maintained over time to ensure as much uniformity as possible in selected characteristics which include flower and foliage colour, flower size, flower set, degree of doubling, petal shape, petal spotting and picoteeing (having a darker edge), colour of the nectaries, habit, vigour, and height.

The label on this plant in my garden read Helleborus 'Gold Collection Love Bug' Lenton Rose. Another plant had the same label, but its flowers were different from these

For instance, the Winter Jewels Onyx Odyssey strain is bred from carefully selected hand pollinated plants by Marietta O'Byrne to maintain purple-black to near black flowers with a near 100% rate of double flowers on strong, vigorous plants. Other strains such as the Royal Heritage Strain, the Lady Series, and the Winter Queen Strain are more varied in their flower colours

and forms and are derived from less meticulous breeding. These are beautiful plants for the landscape but produce flowers of lower quality than the Winter Jewels and other well-bred strains like the Honeymoon and Wedding Party Series.

When selecting from a strain, you should compare the plants and their flowers to find the individual(s) that you most love! They are all different and all have their own particular charms. However, do remember that if you purchase a plant that is not in flower it is impossible to know exactly what you will get!

Wayside Gardens offers its photos of multi-coloured blooms and information of the Helleborus Royal Heritage™ Strain as "super resistant to deer, disease and pests!"

- **Genus:** Helleborus
- **Species:** hybrid
- **Variety:** 'Royal Heritage Strain'
- **Zones:** Early Winter – Early Spring
- **Habit:** Spreading
- **Plant Height:** 18 – 24 inches
- **Plant Width:** 24 inches – 3 feet
- **Bloom Size:** 2 inch blooms

Though superficially the single hellebore flower looks like a normal flower, it's actually a bit different than what you would assume. What we think of as the five hellebore petals — the colourful white, pink, red, purple, near-black, green or yellow structures that get us most excited about these plants — are actually the sepals, which on most other plants are green and protect the petals. The petals of hellebores are actually very small green, yellow, burgundy, or black structures that form a ring around the stamens. In this case they are called nectaries and are important for attracting pollinating insects.


A cheerful double yellow Hellebore in my garden

It is fortuitous for us as gardeners that the colourful part of the hellebore flower is the sepal. If you think about flowers in general, the petals usually have a short lifespan while the sepals can last for months and sometimes are even present on the fruits, as with roses and rose hips. The long-lived sepals of hellebores are what gives us the months of colour that we so appreciate.

Double hellebore flowers occur when the nectaries become petaloid and take on the same colour as the sepals (unlike in most other double flowers where the stamens and pistils become petaloid and the plant becomes infertile).

The form of the double hellebore flower usually consists of the five sepals which cup a number of smaller, usually pointed and more numerous petals.

Anemone centred flowers occur when the nectaries become partially petaloid, take on the colour of the sepals, and surround the stamens like a ruffled ring of baby petals.

Single petaled plants are the most common since this is the natural form of the hellebore flower. Doubles are the second most common and anemone-centred flowers the most rare [uncommon]. Perhaps this is due to the greater interest in double flowers, though crosses of anemone-centred plants tend to produce a lower percentage of anemone-centred offspring than similar crosses with double flowered plants that produce double flowered offspring. Let's just say that to have a double flowered hellebore is rare and special. To have an anemone-centred plant is even more uncommon and well worth hunting for on the tables of blooming hellebore flowers.

Cultivation of Hellebores

Once you decide to plant a hellebore, choose a suitable location in shade or part shade, and preferably sheltered from wind. Soil should be well-drained and rich in humus. Ensure your new plant is planted at garden level and not too deep. Raise it if your drainage is poor or cut in some sand into heavy soils that still drain. You will need to provide water for the first-year plant, and then only when it is very hot -- generally in summer. Once established hellebores are an easy-care plant. Just remove old foliage in spring, and mulch, returning nutrients to the soil and protecting roots from drier weather.

Helleborus x *hybridus* can be grown in full shade but will grow the fastest and have the most flowers in part shade to part sun. A situation with morning sun is ideal. Where the soils are rich and evenly moist, these hellebores can also be grown successfully in relatively full sun though protection from the hottest sun of the day in the afternoon is advisable.

The stemmed hellebores such as *H. foetidus*, *H. argutifolius* and the hybrids x *nigercors*, x *ballardiae*, x *sternii*, and x *ericsmithii* as well as the Frostkiss and Ice 'n Roses series prefer more sun and do best in a part to full sun situation. If not given enough light they can become floppy and will require staking. They could also be shorter lived if planted in shade.

With a regular mulching program, an annual top dressing of two to three inches of compost in winter or early spring is all hellebores really need for fertilizer as long as you've started with reasonably good soil. You can also fertilize with an organic or a conventional slow-release fertilizer. There are two times of the year when you should fertilizer hellebores. The first is towards the end of the flowering period when plants begin to grow new foliage and plantlets within the clump. Fertilizer at this time will encourage strong new growth and bigger, fuller clumps. The other time to fertilize is in the fall. In September and October hellebores begin to initiate buds deep down in their crowns. Fertilizer at this time of year will encourage more flowers in the winter and spring.

Removal of last year's leaves from the *H*. x *hybridus* types at blooming time is an aesthetic choice many gardeners make so as to see the flowers better. It is better not to remove the leaves of young plants since the leaf is photosynthesizing even in spring and making the plant stronger. Once plants are established, they will not even notice the loss of their leaves in spring. Hellebore plants do not require their leaves to be removed. However, removal of the leaves might help to decrease the incidence of pests such as aphids and fungus, if these are an issue.

Pests

Hellebores are usually problem-free in the garden. The older flowers and new growth can sometimes attract green aphids. These should be washed off with a jet of water from the hose or sprayed with an environmentally friendly insecticide like insecticidal soap or a formulation containing *pyrethrins* such as *End All*. Aphids secrete a sweet honeydew and if left too long it can become a site for fungus such as botrytis and sooty moulds. These can also be washed off or leaves can be removed. Aphids are also thought to be a vector for some viruses affecting hellebores. These viruses are not common but it's best to remove aphids when they occur. Slugs will sometimes visit hellebore flowers. Use an environmentally friendly bait such as Safer's Slug Bait during the flowering season.

Investing in Hellebores

Hellebores provide colour for two to three months when you most need it, and they are evergreen year-round. Hellebores cost more than the average perennial because they either have to be tissue cultured or grown from seed, which requires care for 2-3 years to achieve blooming sized plants. However, in a garden, Hellebores willingly produce seeds and so it is always an option to wait a few years to discover the beauty of these natural crosses.

While tissue cultured cultivars may take away a bit of the magic of finding your very own gem, they will all be outstanding plants. Overall, Hellebores are a great investment for your garden since they are extremely long-lived, they will be with you for decades – you can even pass them on to the next generation in your will.

Wow!! Won't my granddaughter be excited to receive these!

Just my kind of gift shopping trip. . .

CVRS Plant Sale

Plants for Sale

With Your Help There Will Be!

CVRS Members' Special and Unusual Plants are what make the CVRS Garden Sale so Special

Again, we are asking for your generous donations as you divide your plants this spring. If you feel you have too many plants that could be divided than your energy allows, contact the Executive Team to set up a lively propagating event.

WE CAN DO THIS SWIFTLY AND SAFELY

SPRING EDUCATION MEETING

Saturday, March 6, 2021
By zoom

Vancouver Island Master Gardeners

VANCOUVER ISLAND MASTER GARDENER
MEMBER MEETING at 11 am

Separate Zoom links will be sent for morning and afternoon sessions

Presentation Open to ARS District 1 Chapter Members

Session Opens at 12:45 pm

Special Presentation at 1 pm

Linda Chalker Scott

"Raised Bed Gardens:
Keeping your veggies – and your family – safe"

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: Verna Buhler
Vice-President: Ali Morris
Treasurer: Randy Bouchard
Secretary: Diane Allen
Director-at-Large: Candice Feeney
Director-at-Large: Wendy Wilson
Director-at-Large: Barrie Agar
Director-at Large: Dorothy Kennedy
Membership Chairperson: David Annis

Convenors

Sunshine: Mary Gale
Tea: Judeen Hendrickson
Raffle: Hilda Gerrits
Program Planning: The ExecutiveTeam
Fundraising: The Executive Team
Garden Tours: TBA
Library: Verna Buhler

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 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

Magnolia soulageana
Photo: Steve Brickley

2020 – 2021

Calendar of Events

Contact CVRS:

cowichanvalleyrhododendron@gmail.com

Wednesday, March 3, 2021 7 pm:

Rosemary Prufner:
"Propagation of Rhododendrons (plus maple and conifer grafting)"

(Organized by Barrie from Al Campbell)

Saturday, March 6, 2021 1 pm

Linda Chalker Scott:
"Raised Bed Gardens – keeping your veggies - and your families - safe"

(Organized by District 1/Vancouver Island Master Gardeners)

Thursday, March 18, 2021 7 pm:

Richie Steffen:
"The Miller Garden, Legacy of a Plantswoman"

(Organized by ARS Portland Chapter)

Saturday, March 20, 2021 7 pm:

Brian Minter:
"What's New in Edible Gardening"

(Organized by Glen Jamieson, District 1)

Thursday, March 25, 2021 7 pm:

Mark Columbel:
"Rhododendron Propagation by an Amateur for Amateurs"

(Organized by ARS Eureka Chapter)

April: CVRS TBA

April – Date, Time?

Brian White:
"Vietnam in the Spring"

(Organized by Glen Jamieson, District 1)

May: CVRS TBA

May – Date, Time?

Marion Mackay, Massey University, New Zealand:
"The New Zealand ex situ Rhododendron Conservation Project"

(Organized by Glen Jamieson, District 1)

CVRS PLANT SALE

MAY - TBA