



Newsletter



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

Volume 28:4 May 2017

President's Message

Believe it or not, spring has stealthily moved into our gardens, not with great fanfare and brilliant colour, but with flowers opening up slowly, one by one. The daffodils have slowly taken over from snowdrops and crocuses, and the magnolias are peeking out of their buds. And what about the rhododendrons? They are starting to catch up too. At Royal Roads, I noticed the stalwart *R. 'Cosmopolitan'* in bloom, a little late perhaps, but not unreasonably so. *Rhododendron johnstoneanum* is has just opened up as well, a particularly nice form from the Species Foundation with large clear cream flowers. However they are blooming at the same time as *R. 'Rosamundi'*, which should be long gone at this time of year. I suspect there will be much intermingling this year, as those delayed by the interminable cold catch up



R. 'Cosmopolitan'

CVRS Monthly Meeting

Wednesday, May 3

7:30 pm St. John's Church

Sean Rafferty

**Species Rhododendrons and
Companion Plants in Their
Native Habitats**

(More details on page 2)

In This Issue:

Letter from the Editor 3

Rhododendron 'Airy Fairy' 4

Summer Picnic 6

Rhododendron Species
Symposium 7

Rhododendron Leaf Shapes
12

Upcoming Events 13

70th Community Flower &
Garden Show 14

North American Meets
Europe 14

with those blooming at their appointed time. Perhaps there will be some interesting crosses made, between rhododendrons hitherto unfamiliar with each other, kept separate by the weather and seasons.

Underneath, the anenomes, trilliums, and primulas are beginning their displays. They give a spectacular show throughout April and May. There are many other plants that associate well with rhododendrons. Ferns alone could become a lifetime study. *Begonia grandis*, the hardy begonia appreciates the same conditions as the rhododendrons, and while not as flashy as the large flowered tuberous hybrids, has a quiet elegance that suits its larger companion.

There will be plenty of unfamiliar plants to see at the Garden Fair, Saturday, April 29th, between 10 am and 2 pm at the Cowichan Exhibition Grounds. There are new local growers, and plenty of companion plants to be found should you be looking to fill up the gaps between rhododendrons. The ever-popular truss show may have depleted ranks this year, but it is still one of the best places to pick out your favourite flowers.



Begonia grandis

Barrie Agar, President

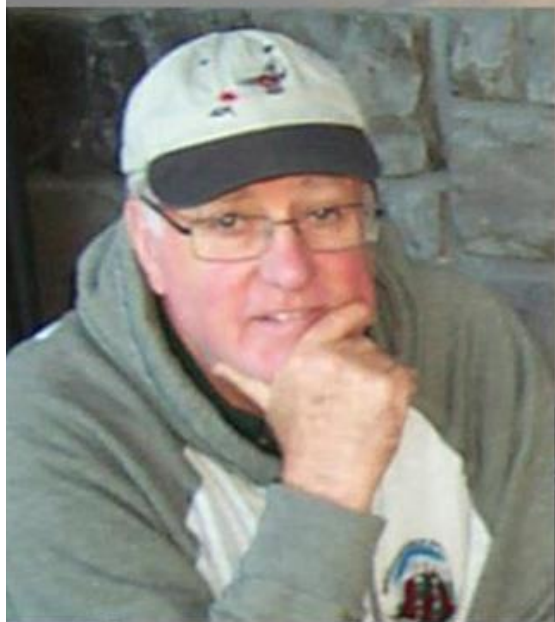
SEAN RAFFERTY

Presents.....

Species Rhododendrons and Companion

Plants In Their Native Habitat

May 3, 2017



At our CVRS meeting on May 3, Sean Rafferty of our Chapter will recount some of his observations of species rhododendron and some of their companion plants in their natural habitat. These observations were gleaned from three trips to the Sino-Himalaya and one to the eastern Himalaya in Sikkim.

Sean is a retired gardener who has recently moved to southern Vancouver Island, in order to help feed their ravenous deer population. He is still studying species rhododendrons and has been an active board member for many District 1 Chapters, editor of the Fraser South newsletter and a Board member of the Rhododendron Species Foundation. He is a wealth of knowledge, an enthusiastic individual, and a huge asset to the plant community.

Letter *from the Editor*



It is Thursday morning and I am supposed to be outside pruning, planting and potting up those extra plants for the plant fair. No, I am not a procrastinator caught by the intrigue of the computer screen. Too easily my focus shifts to what I see outside my window. Are these the purple finch or the house finch? When they pick at the *Prunus* 'Akebone' blossoms, then lift them off the branch and drop them, what have they found?

No, it's the weather, I have my jacket on, my pruning belt beside me and every time I see the sun shining I walk the three steps toward my boots. Just then the rain begins, thin strings of sparkle slip down amidst the sunrays. Sun and drizzle is just fine, so I put on my boots. As if experiencing a mood swing, the sky darkens with a black cloud that opens to release the wet that drenches and appears to be part hail or snow.

No problem, I will continue to work on the May newsletter. Within a minute the sun returns; the clouds are white and fluffy against bright blue. Boots and work belt . . . May newsletter . . . boots, work belt . . . and repeat.



A cheerful welcome at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden during the weekend of the RSBF Symposium in April

It is embarrassing to acknowledge how many times I have fallen for this today. Continuously --- all morning and into the afternoon, at times merely seconds occurring between major shifts. Finally, the newsletter wins! As do the birds in the cherry tree; the coffee is brewing.

In this issue, some photos and report about the fabulous Rhododendron Species Botanical Foundation Symposium, photos and information about some rhododendrons that bloom early in our valley gardens, and more information about identifying rhododendrons, in this case, by their foliage. And, of course, information about our own CVRS Garden Fair!

Verna Buhler

Rhododendron 'Airy Fairy'

Ian E. Efford

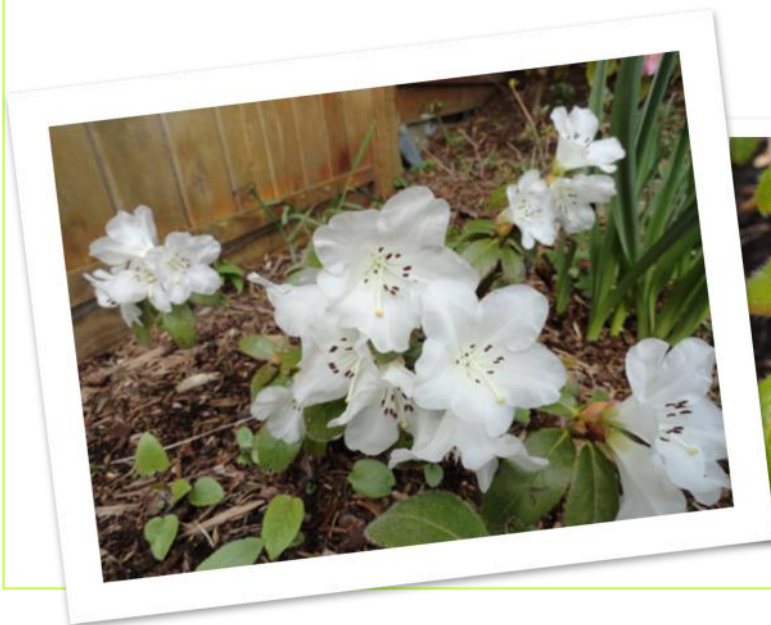
After a long cold winter, at least by our Warmlands standards, it is very uplifting to see a positive indication that spring has arrived. We can now expect to be overwhelmed by jobs in the garden as seedlings germinate and need potting up, lawns need cutting, and watering tasks are not too far off . . .



Apart from spring bulbs, one of the very first signs of spring is the flowering of *Rhododendron* 'Airy Fairy', which is in full flower in March and will continue to flower for at least the first half of April. The hybrid was registered by Mrs. F. Maloney in 1968 and is a cross between *R. lutescens* and *R. mucronulatum* var *mucronulatum* var. Cornell Pink. *R. lutescens* is a yellow bush from the Yunnan-Sichuan region of south China, where as *R. mucronulatum* is very widespread in the wild being found from Siberia right across northern China, Manchuria, Korea and extending as far south as Japan.

Because of the northern origin of one of the parents, the plant is very hardy and will grow without any trouble throughout coastal BC.

It should be noted, as well, that both the parent species are excellent garden plants and well worth growing for their colour and their contribution to the landscape.



At the moment, other rhododendrons that are beginning to flower in our garden are the very early hybrid *R. 'Snow Queen'*, and the species *R. dauricum*, and *R. leucaspis*. *Rhododendron dauricum* has almost the same distribution in the wild as *R. mucronulatum* and is equally hardy, whereas *R. leucaspis* is a delightful, small plant with white flowers and dark chocolate anthers that is found above 2000 meters in Tibet and well adapted to the cold. At that altitude, it demonstrates one of the characteristics of high alpine plants in that the leaves are covered in long hairs.



***Rhododendron* 'Snow Queen' in Shirley and Ian Efford's garden**



Thank you Ian, for submitting this article and the photos of your one-eyed observations in your garden in early April.

In late Dixie Mueller's garden *Rhododendron* 'Coral Glow' was blooming two weeks ago. It was definitely eye-catching and Dixie had planted it to be viewed through her living room window.

My research led me to understand that *R. 'Coral Glow'* too, is a cross between the two parents, *mucronulatum* var *mucronulatum* 'Cornell Pink' and *lutescens*, with reversed parenting.

Verna Buhler



R. 'Coral Glow'



SUMMER PICNIC

Saturday, June 17, 2017

Hosted by Maria and Siggie Kemmler

3730 Gibbons Road, Duncan, BC



Theme: "Canadian Enthusiasm"

WEAR RED – Shirts, Hats, Pants, Dresses, Shoes

Potluck Meal:

- Provided: Main meat or fish will be provided
Punch, some spirits
- Bring: Your favourite picnic dishes to share --- Savoury, Sweet, Salads, or Bread
Personal Drinks

Seating and Eating:

- Bring: Lawn Chairs
Personal Plates and Cutlery



Official Elections

for the 2017- 2018

CVRS Executive Committee

Will take place at the June CVRS Meeting
at the Summer Picnic, kindly hosted by
Maria and Siggie Kemmler

VOLUNTEER FOR A POSITION OF FUN!!

Have a great time next year by becoming FULLY involved in the more enjoyable aspects of club membership!

The CVRS offers growing opportunities and a medium for propagating your great ideas!

Be the growth and changes you would love to see!!
Share your willingness, interests, skills and talents.

RHODODENDRON SPECIES SYMPOSIUM

A Memorable First Visit to the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden

On Saturday night, April 8th, 2017, the conference hall, at the hotel in Federal Way, Washington, where informative and instructional presentations had challenged our minds' capabilities for learning, had been transformed for the final banquet. A number of other attendees of the Rhododendron Species Foundation Symposium were already seated with drinks in hand and chatting in freshly sporty and unbundled attractiveness. It had been a cool and drizzly day at the workshops in the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, so most of us had been hidden beneath raingear.

Steve Hootman, leading the workshop on “**Big-leaf Rhododendrons**” had abandoned the idea of handouts, so most of us carried cameras. I had encouraged George, my husband, to follow Atsuko Gibson and Ben Meersman to learn about the “**Successful cultivation of rhododendrons – the RSBG way**”. Perhaps, in the future, we wouldn't argue about methods of preparing our garden beds for planting rhododendrons. Now we were back inside, warm and ready for a feast.

A vase displaying a single truss of rhododendrons centered each of the fourteen tables. Intriguing it



Steve Hootman explains distinguishing details when identifying the big-leaf rhododendrons

was, as each truss was different. On each numbered table was a stack of papers with a correspondingly numbered blank chart entitled NAME THAT SPECIES; a species identification contest was underway. Not one timid of contests, I attempted to identify the truss at Table 12, a table perhaps strategically chosen by George near the bar at the back of the room. It should be an easy task as it had a bright red piston. The CVRS library book, McQuire and Robinson's ***Pocket Guide to Rhododendron Species*** slipped out of my bag, and the gentleman at our table accused me of cheating. I defended myself pointing to Sean Rafferty and another guest both busy with their phones as they

assessed the truss at another table. They weren't texting each other, I was quite certain. The gentleman, who I believe was known only as White--- at least that was all he offered---wasn't all that impressed with my book though, because apparently he didn't favour the referenced author, H. H. Davidian. Having read the *Preface* of the books weeks before, I was aware of the controversy, and attempted to defend the book. Furthermore, Steve Hootman had written the supportive *Foreword*, and I knew many knowledgeable people who credited this reference book, so I was proud to use it. However, when I couldn't find a photo to match the truss in the book, which features over 1000 species in its almost 700 pages, I asked what White thought it was. "Don't quote me, but I am quite certain it is *calyphytum*." I wrote it down on my paper and moved on to *cheat* at the other tables. I shared the CVRS book with others, peeked at their papers, listened in on discussions, and simply recorded their whispered answers to my questions. What a comfortable excuse to impose myself at the tables of so many knowledgeable and fascinating people!

At the presentations, I wrote furiously to record what I was hearing, and openly admitted that I knew nothing. I was encouraged by the new RSF president, to be pleased to leave with a little bit of



new knowledge every time I attended such events, and that I wouldn't always have to feel as humbled.

Dr. Hartwig Scheptker, Scientific Director of the Botanic Garden and Rhododendron Park Bremen, home of one of the largest Rhododendron collections in the world. Hartwig's "main objectives are to promote the important ecological functions of Rhododendrons in their native habitats and to point out the long and important role of rhododendrons in the history of gardening in Germany". His first topic "*The Other Rhododendron Species --- the rhododendrons of Kamchatka, the Russian Altai and beyond*" opened a new world of the least known rhododendron regions for many of the attendees. At the banquet, his second presentation, "*The Rhododendron Gardens of Europe*", colourful with photos of gardens in UK, Denmark, Italy and Germany, certainly encouraged the trip to the ARS 2017 Convention in Bremen, Germany.

Dr. Hartwig Scheptker thoroughly enjoyed Steve's tour and explanation of large leaf rhododendrons. Later, when we were chatting, he enthusiastically expressed his pleasure about visiting the species garden at this time of year and described with equal enthusiasm how he would spend the remainder of his trip, which would include visiting Vancouver. I didn't realize I was capable of "hero awe" until I felt it while "chatting" with Hartwig in the garden.

Some attendees were able to ask intelligent questions of Valarie Soza, Research Scientist at the University of Washington, after hearing her presentation focussed on *vireyas*, and the genetic basis for changes in floral shapes using genomic data. I took excellent notes for the purpose of studying to understand them some time in my future.

Dennis Bottemiller, spoke on the process involved in developing the Rutherford Conservatory that houses fabulous *vireyas* and rare and unusual companion plants.

Dennis also led one of the three workshops offered, "**Secrets of species propagation**", which involved

a detailed demonstration on the latest propagation techniques and a tour of the nursery. During my career as a teacher, I attended many educational conferences, but never once have I wished that the days were longer so that I could actually attend every workshop offered.

Ken Webb, handsomely sporting a suit and tie at the banquet, sold the ambitious 2018 ARS Conference along with its enticing tour packages, which will be held in Europe next spring. During the past month, while we relaxed with a glass of wine, I had made some soft comments to George about this intriguing event in Bremen, mentioning that I really ought to put my name on the Teacher-on-Call list if it ever opened to retired teachers. He hadn't taken my comments seriously until Ken made him listen.

There had not been enough time to visit the entire garden on Saturday afternoon, so some of us returned to wander through and admire to the garden on Sunday morning. This was also the time scheduled to meet with the *phyto* representative who would authorize that our selected purchases were free of diseases before bringing them into Canada. Because of the reputation of the RSF garden and the trusted relationship with customs



Dennis Bottemiller always looks this pleasant and approachable, whether in the garden or while presenting



Foliage and flowers of *vireyas* in the Rutherford Conservatory



officials the process was not as complex as several attendees had experienced several days earlier when they made purchases at other nurseries.

With camera in hand, and still rushing, I attempted to absorb the beauty and fragrance of so many unfamiliar plants.

Art and Susan Lightburn found and directed me to the spectacular display of *Rhododendron albrechtii*. These two lovely people were just two of a strong contingent of Canadians and Vancouver Island rhododendron enthusiasts at the symposium. Ken, Sean, Garth, all leaders in the rhododendron organizations; familiar members from the Victoria Chapter, and others from up-Island such as Chris; from the mainland were Tom, Charles, and Margaret, (one of the most knowledgeable gardeners that I might ever meet). There were many fabulous people that I had not met before. In fact, there were rumours that people at more than one table were discussing the merits of reigniting the Republic of Cascadia movement.

Just as it was time to leave the garden, someone recommended that wandering through the Pacific Bonsai Museum would be worth a delayed departure time, and it was. Well, it was to me at least. George, who tends to have a clearer sense of travel time felt we should be concerned about border and ferry crossings. In art gallery style, large works of art were positioned behind the bonsai. Normally one to appreciate nature loosely echoed in gardens, the soothing effect of the quiet and peaceful beauty of the presentations took me by surprise, and I noted that I began to tip toe through the garden.





Why haven't I visited this treasure grove before? The answer is relatively obvious. It is across a body of water, the Strait, and in another country.

But really, it actually is much too close to forget about for more than a month at a time. Sean Rafferty explained that to fully appreciate this garden one must visit it at least each month between February and June. I can understand that now. Did you know that large drifts of *meconopsis* plants are growing beautifully as garden companions to the rhododendrons? Did you know that Saturday, May 20th, is **Blue Poppy Day --- Art in Bloom** at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden? Do you know that someone really ought to gather a van full of garden enthusiasts together for a road trip to Federal Way? Do you know who that person is, because it is tempting, isn't it?

So, at the banquet, when Steve Hootman came by each table to gather the Species Identification Contest sheets from individuals, I reluctantly showed

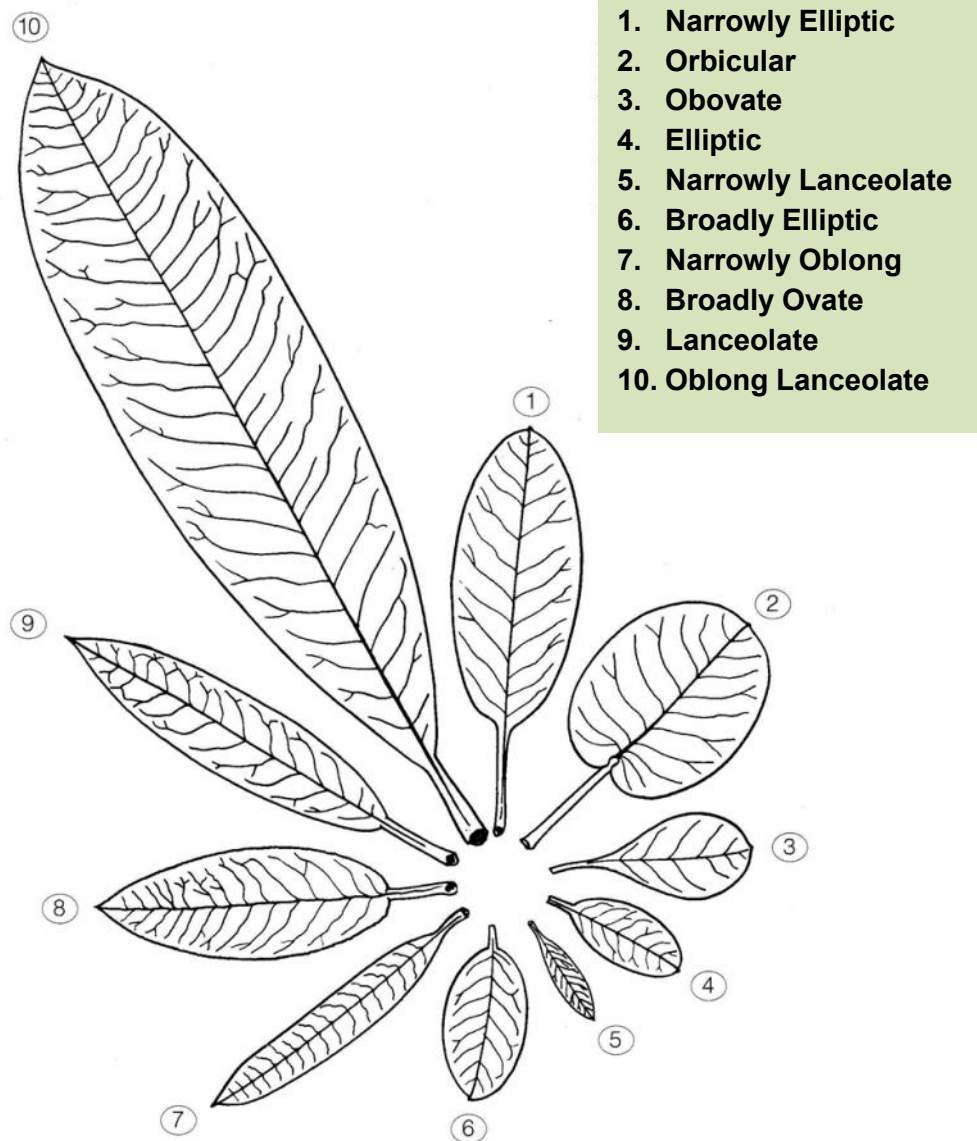


him that my sheet only had a few answers and so I was just keeping mine. He asked about the truss on our table and I showed him what I had written down. His face held surprise and a new respect when he told me that the answer was actually right. I couldn't do it; I pointed to White and admitted that he had told me what it was. There were two competitors with near perfect papers, but it was the youngest attendee at the event with the perfect score. She received great applause and all around her faces wore respect. She couldn't do it either; she blushed brightly, laughed uncomfortably and accused Dennis Bottemiller of writing her name on his paper.

Verna Buhler



Rhododendron Leaf Shapes



Rhododendron rothschildii



Stunning foliage!
Are you able to identify its
leaf shape?

MAY GARDEN TOURS

CVRS Member Open Garden

May is a special month for CVRS members as this is the best time to open and share their gardens with other CVRS members. Thank you so much to the hard working gardeners who, despite the destructive effects of an unusually cold winter, have graciously agreed to open their gardens this spring.

Thursday, May 4; 5 pm to sundown

Al and Liz Murray

1951 Doran Rd

Cobble Hill



Friday, May 5; 5 pm to sundown

Don Loewen and Louise Neveu

6324 Genoa Bay Road

Duncan





Thursday, May 11; 5 pm to sundown
Richard and Marie Jacques,
1340 Lovers Lane,
Cobble Hill



Monday, May 8; 5 pm to sundown
Mona Kaiser and Dr. Tom Rimmer
6181 Grieve Road
Duncan



Upcoming Events/Speakers

April 29, 2017

COWICHAN VALLEY GARDEN FAIR 2017

Saturday 10 – 2 pm

www.CowichanValleyGardenFair.com

May 3, 2017

CVRS Monthly Meeting St. John's Church, 7:30 pm

SEAN RAFFERTY from Victoria: "A to Z of Rhododendron Species"

Thursday, May 4, 5 pm to sundown

Member Garden Tour – Al and Liz Murray

Friday, May 5, 5 pm to sundown

Member Garden Tour - Don Loewen and Louise Neveu

May 7, 2017

Nanaimo 24th annual Truss Show & Sale

Centennial Building, Beban Park

Monday, May 8, 5 pm to sundown

Member Garden Tour – Dr. Tom Rimmer and Mona Kaiser

Thursday, May 11, 5 pm to sundown

Member Garden Tour – Richard and Marie Jacques,

May 12, 2017

BC Iris Society – Oregon Garden Tour (4 day tour)

May 20 – 22, 2017

Kitty Coleman Woodland Gardens Art and Bloom Festival www.woodlandgardens.ca

May 11, 2017; 5pm - sundown

Member Garden Tour – Richard and Marie Jaques

More information will follow in the May Newsletter

June, 2017

CVRS Summer Picnic and Awards/Wrap Up:

Hosted by Maria and Siggie Kemmler, in their spectacular garden

September, 2017

CVRS Monthly Meeting 7:30 pm St John's Church – **Geoffrey Ball**, Director of Milner Garden



Rhododendron kesangiae

One of the hardiest big leafed rhododendrons

The *R. kesangiae* leaf shape is:

- a) narrowly elliptic,
- b) narrowly oblong
- c) oblong lanceolate
- d) other

70th Community Flower & Garden Show

Mill Bay Garden Club

Saturday, May 27; 9 am to 2 pm

Cobble Hill Community Hall, 3550 Watson Avenue, Cobble Hill



The “Strawberry Tea”: offered by South Cowichan Healthcare Auxiliary

Gardening workshops:

- Margaret Walker: “**Hardy Ferns**” at 9:30am
- Victoria Compost Education Centre: “**Composting Basics**” at 10:30am

Competition demonstrating skills learned and practiced: over 80 classes

Open to the public - a list of competition classes and rules at Buckerfield's, Thrifty Foods, Country Grocer, Valley Vines to Wines, and Dinter Nursery

or download from our website: www.millbaygardenclub.com or email: millbaygardenshow@gmail.com.

Call **Janet Abbott at 250-743-9875** for more information.

Silent Auction: showcasing many garden related and handmade items, bids accepted until 1:00pm.

Master Gardeners: offer answers to gardening questions

Plant and Garden Vendors: located on the grounds of Cobble Hill Hall.

North America Meets Europe

The 2018 ARS Convention will be in Bremen, Germany. It will start around May 7, 2018, with optional tours before and after the convention. The schedule probably will change slightly in the next couple of months.

First Pre-Tour: Optional 5-day visiting Dutch Gardens including Keukenhof Gardens

Second Pre-Tour: Optional 2-day visiting RHODO 2018 Rhododendron Festival and Hachmann's Nursery

Third Pre-Tour: Optional 7-day visiting public and private gardens in Denmark and Sweden

Convention: 6-day convention in Bremen from May 21 to 26 including 3 days of garden tours

Post-Tour: Optional 4-day visiting gardens in Finland.



'Rotgold'* x 'Amaretto'
Photo by Tijs Huisman

Mark your calendar now! This is an opportunity not to be missed. You can choose to start in Holland or Germany with one of the 3 pre-tours or start with the convention. Then you can choose to finish in Germany after the convention or in Finland after the post-convention tour. That means there are 8 possible combinations ranging from 6 days for just the convention to 24 days if you do all pre and post tours and the convention.



'Melidioso' x 'Roteold'*
Photo by Tijs Huisman

2016-17 Executive

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

Vice President: Judeen Hendricksen

Past President: Carrie Nelson

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

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

Membership Chair: Trudy Muiser

Directors at Large:
Siggi Kemmler, Alan Campbell, Peter Lewis, Ron Martin

Convenors

Sunshine: Mary Gale

Tea: Judeen Hendricksen

Raffle: Hilda Gerrits

Club Liaison: Alan Campbell

Library: Joyce Rodger

Membership Recruitment: Peter Lewis

Program Co-ordinator: Peter Lewis, Sandra Stevenson

History: Ian Efford

Garden/Bus Tours: Peter Lewis

CV Garden Fair: The Team

Facility Liaison: Roy Elvins

Christmas Party: The Team

Bus Tours: Vacant

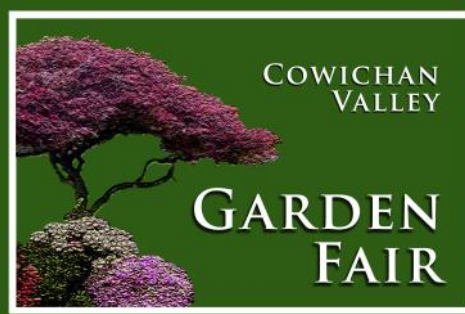
Newsletter design/format & website edits by
Mary-Lynn Boxem (mlboxem77@gmail.com)



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

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

<http://cowichanrhodos.ca>



Saturday, April 29, 2017; 10-2
<http://cowichanvalleygardenfair.com>



twitter.com/CowGardenFair



[www.facebook.com/
CowichanValleyGardenFair](https://www.facebook.com/CowichanValleyGardenFair)