

Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

Newsletter

Volume 31:4 May 2020

Message from the President

Wendy Wilson, CVRS President for May

Hi Friends,

May has always been my favorite month of the year. We are in our busiest and most exciting time of the season as far as our gardens are concerned. Our time is consumed with weeding, raking, planting, fertilizing, mulching, planning new garden beds, and gazing through books and magazines for new ideas on how to improve old garden beds. Remember to take a step back and admire your hard work and creativity and take a moment to enjoy all of the beauty that you have accomplished instead of seeing all that still needs to be done.



Prunus x yedoensis 'Akebono'

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In my own garden, I am trying to correct many years of neglect now that I have recently retired. My excuse for the neglect is fifteen years of commuting. No more excuses, I need to rid my garden of many plants that seemed like a good idea to plant at the time. I am currently at war with St. John's wort. The battle has only begun but I am determined to be the victor.

During this time of self-isolation, I am so thankful that it is spring and grateful that we have our gardens to help us with our mental well-being. I miss the plant sales and the garden tours the most now. I miss the camaraderie of being with people who share my passion for gardening. The garden tours give me inspiration to tackle new projects and

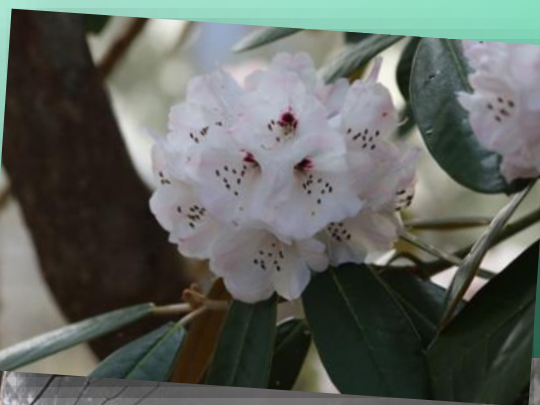
improve on old ones. I miss the *oohing* and *aahing* over a spectacular plant, flower or garden. And I miss wandering along moss cushioned pathways winding among beds bursting with rhododendron blooms in almost every shade of color, size and texture. In one way, I may even miss waiting in line and trying to scope out the plant tables to get that prized and unusual plant that gets my heart racing.

But here we are instead. Take a moment to enjoy your family and your garden, especially at this time. As my elderly neighbor pointed out, "*life is like a roll of toilet paper; the closer that we get to the end, the quicker time goes*".

Wendy Wilson



Ken Gibson's Tofino Garden



Letter *from the Editor*



Hi Friends!

It has been so nice that a number of you have been sharing your gardens with other members by sending lovely photos of your blooms as they cheer your spirits, and thereby lift ours. It has also been wonderful that the weather has been perfect for spending time outside, in close proximity with plants and animals that do not feel the same restrictions that we find difficult. Interestingly though, their lives are by nature more confined than ours. Our pets have fences, and our plants have pots or the garden beds into which they are rooted. They are relatively dependent on our care. At some point in the future, we may be stepping outside to bang our tools together for the mutual caregivers of all living and breathing life forms.

Too mushy – too Margaret Atwood? That is quite possible; there has been more time, too much time perhaps, to ponder current experiences in light of the larger world and the future. In this edition of the newsletter, however, the focus is *simply back to basics, basic care and simple enriching wonder*. Al Campbell has submitted several timely articles. One about the blooming surprises in our garden collections, and the other about straight forward tips for pruning rhododendrons. The *simple enriching wonder* portion comes from our members sharing their gardens online.



Osmanthus x burkwoodii with *Phlox subulata* 'Emerald Blue Cushion'



Rhododendron 'Sir Charles Lemon'



Magnolia stellata



Iberis sempervirens

Following the Les Clay article and the photos shared by Bernie Dinter, a pioneer Ken Gibson, who owns several properties in Tofino, renowned for their fabulous rhododendron gardens has been communicating with me – the lucky editor of this newsletter. You will see several of the photos he submitted.

Hopefully you enjoy the short features, the quick “study” of a species offering unique characteristics. As my familiarity and passion about rhododendrons has grown, I have come to understand how meeting the species of the genre has expanded my appreciation of all of my rhododendrons. Their special features, their hardiness, their specific needs and idiosyncrasies begin to make more sense when I meet their parents. Should I say it? Parent-teacher interviews were often helpful in working with a student. Last month, readers met *Rhododendron faithii*. This month *Rhododendron mallosum* has been chosen to serve that purpose.



Magnolia stellata 'Royal Star'

Members are also encouraged to participate in the **Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society Truss Plus Show**. Read the list of categories prepared by Barrie Agar. It's easy. Simply send your photos to: cowichanvalleyrhododendron@gmail.com You will see a few examples of those that have been received.



Spirea vanhouttei

As Sandra quoted from a video just the other day when she kindly delivered masks she had made for George and me: “We fell asleep in one world, and woke up in another. . .Power, money, and beauty

are worthless, and can't get you the oxygen you are fighting for. . .The world continues its life, and it's beautiful! . . . [It's message, perhaps] . . .The earth, water, and sky are fine without you. . .When you come back, remember, you are my guests, not my masters.” As gardeners, we intuitively know this and are grateful for this awareness.

Enjoy the snapshots of gardens shared.

Verna



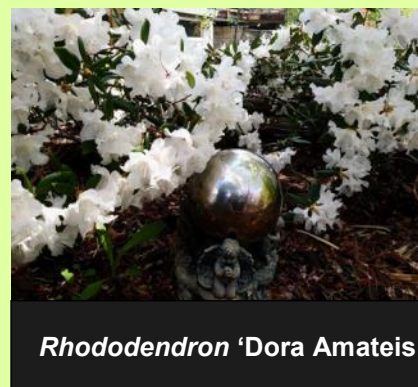
Pulsatilla vulgaris 'Alba'



Camelia japonica 'Silver Waves'



Rhododendron yakushimanum 'Angel'



Rhododendron 'Dora Amateis'

Erroneous Epithet

Article and Photos by Alan Campbell

I read in the April edition of the CVRS newsletter of Ali Morris's disappointing first flowering of her prized *R. sinogrande* with some sympathy and understanding and thought I should reach out and share some disappointments of my own.



Rhododendron sutchuenense

Many years ago, when first planting our rhododendron garden, I was looking to add some hardy 'big leaf' varieties. As we attended the various Chapter plant sales on the Island as well as the Lower Mainland, we managed to pick up a few such as *R. calophytum*, *R. rothschildii*, *R. sutchuenense*, and *R. macabeaenum*. We planted these out with pleasure and with some anticipation towards the day they would bloom.

It was accepted and understood that many species rhododendrons take many more years before blooming than their respected hybrids. To this day, we still have not seen blooms on some of our 'big leaves'. A few years ago, I noticed some bud swelling on our *R. sutchuenense* and checked almost daily on its progress. Late in that year's month of March she finally showed herself. Disbelief! Disappointment! The bloom displayed its masquerade.

In their *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species*, the father and son team of Peter and Kenneth Cox describe *R. sutchuenense* as a tall growing plant (which ours is), with long leaves up to 30cms long (which ours has), that recurve downward at the edges and the underside mid-rib with loose indumentum (which ours has). The flower is

described as varying from pale pink, pinkish-lilac to pale mauve-pink with red spotting but *without a blotch*. What the hey!

The Cox duo go on to explain the distribution of *R. sutchuenense* in the Chinese Provinces of Hubei and Sichuan as growing in close proximity to another 'big leaf' *R. praeevernum*. *R. praeevernum* is described as a lower growing plant with leaves up to 18cms long with no recurving leaf margins and an under-leaf entirely glabrous (smooth, no hairs, glands or indumentum) with a flower varying



Rhododendron praeevernum

from white, pale to deep pink, pinkish-lilac or pinkish-purple but also having a *large purple or crimson blotch*.

When Ernest Henry “Chinese” Wilson collected rhododendron seed in China in the first decade of the 1900’s, his collection number W.509 produced the plant which was realized to be a natural hybrid between *R. sutchuenense* and *R. praevernum* and was to be recorded as *R. x geraldii*. Now there is much discussion on whether the plant should be considered a variety of *R. sutchuenense* or if it has speciated and should therefore be regarded as a separate species. *Rhododendron x geraldii*, in my opinion, retains the best of each parent, the foliage of *R. sutchuenense* and the flower of *R. praevernum*. A mistaken identification which gave me a superior plant.

I should come to the seed collector’s defense. When going into the wilds to collect seed, the collector must depend on knowledge of plant habit and foliage *keying out*. This also goes to those of us who propagate from cuttings. We enter private gardens and beg for cuttings relying on the garden owner’s memory and or the label affixed to the plant. Unless provenance is provided it becomes a trust issue. *Provenance* * is paramount in the establishment of the Greig Rhododendron Species Garden at Milner Gardens and Woodland, which is why most of the species have come from the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden in Federal Way Washington. I recall Doug Justice saying that a large rhododendron at UBC, which he knew well, had lost its label and accession number; therefore, provenance was lost.

As gardeners, we enjoy the plants we have, we look forward to new additions seeking out the new; perhaps we like to ‘push the envelope’ in our own micro-climate.

I leave you with a thought: “*If you haven’t planted anything lately you haven’t botany*”.

*The record of the place of origin or earliest known history of something, recorded by *accession* numbers



Rhododendron x geraldii

One of a Kind

Trochodendron aralioides

By Verna Buhler

Trochodendron aralioides is a unique flowering plant native to Japan, southern Korea, and Taiwan where it lives in montane mixed forests. It can be found in mountainous areas up to nearly 10,000 feet elevation. This evergreen tree or large shrub can grow to 20 metres tall and has leathery dark green leaves that are borne in tight spirals at the apex of the years' growth. Because of this characteristic, it is colloquially referred to as "wheel tree". Another reason for its common name may be the flowers. Its yellowish-green *flowers* are produced in *racemes* of 10 to 20 but are without petals; instead they are composed of rings of 40 to 70 *stamens* surrounding 4 to 11 *carpels* (parts of *pistels*).



Photo: Daniel Mosquin, 2005
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>



'Wheel tree' tolerates temperatures down to -10C (14F); it requires moisture-retentive soil and grows best with a pH in the neutral range. Although it will tolerate partial shade, it prefers sun. Once established, it is not easily moved. This tree can be seen growing in the Pacific West Coast at the University of British Columbia and at the Washington Park Arboretum.

Most interesting perhaps, is that this plant is the sole, living species in the genus *Trochodendron*, which also includes several extinct species. Some taxonomists consider the family quite primitive in origin, placing it between the magnolias and the witch hazels. The wood of wheel tree, lacking vessels, resembles that of conifers more than the wood of most broadleaf trees.

Personally, I am intrigued, and I would like to see this tree, and I admit, too typically perhaps, own one.

A Garden of Spectacular “Specials”

“I love every one of them, like they just got that elusive blue ribbon”

Submitted by Ali Morris



R. niveum



R. ‘Babylon’



R. ‘Loderi King George’



***R. ‘Orient’*, a hybrid
made by our late and
founding member Fred**



R. spinuliferum



R. augustinii

In a Forest Near You

Thank-you to Elisabeth Zoffman for these beautiful photos

***Calypso bulboso*, a tiny native orchid that is “blooming in forests near you right now. Enjoy!”**



My Rhodi's Too Big

Submitted by Alan Campbell

Reprinted from The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society Newsletter

Originally, reprinted with permission from Plant Amnesty

Pruning Tips: Seven Solutions to the “Too-Big” Rhododendron

The problem with rhododendrons is, well, they're touchy. Sometimes you head back a branch to a node, and when you return next month you find that, instead of sending out new shoots, the branch simply gave up and died. On other occasions people reduce their rhodies to the height and width they want, only to discover that by the time the plants have developed decent, full leafy crowns, they're back up to about the same size they were before. The hardest to prune are previously chain-sawed rhododendrons. The new growth looks like spaghetti. Although many can be brought back to a semblance of beauty with years of rehabilitative pruning, these casualties are often so indisputably ugly that removal is a more realistic solution. Just to confuse matters, radical reduction sometimes results in growth which is bushy, compact, healthy, AND shorter. Much depends on whether the species in question is healthy and of a compact habit to begin with, and if it receives sufficient sunlight to re-establish. Another commonly seen situation is that of a large-growing, open-habit rhododendron



which someone is trying to keep shorter and more compact. The hapless pruner tries in vain. Even when following the “rules” by selectively heading back branches to shorten laterals, the result is a “funny-looking” plant, which is to say it starts to grow in a roughly v-shaped pattern.

With the above caveats in place, let’s review seven solutions to the too-big rhododendron.

Prune it

Most people think their rhody is too big, but really, it’s just too oppressive and/or crowded. Real pruning for health and good looks often solves the problem. The horticulturally correct pruner takes out all of the dead wood. Do this first and always. Prune out a few of the worst, most rubbing/crossing branches. Often it helps to take off some of the lowest branches, slowly working up and out and up from the inside. Also concentrate on thinning out the worst, most interfering branches which crowd into nearby shrubs, the house, the window, the gutter, or the walkway. See if that doesn’t do the trick.

Move it or the bed it’s in

Given the touchy nature of the beast, it is often better and longer lasting to increase the shrub bed size to accommodate the plant. This is a creative but unpopular solution due to the removal of sod involved. Rhodies have broad, flat, fibrous root systems and are a relative dream to move. Landscapers often move plants that are larger than people. It may require up to four strong backs and a tarp to slide the offending rhody out of its present home and to its new one. Don’t be afraid to cut off 50% or more of the roots, both large and small. Immediate watering and lots of water throughout the first year is essential. Moving is the only logical solution where shrubs have been planted too close together to begin with – as commonly seen in new landscapes.

Selective reduction

Is it under a window? You can try to “work back” your rhody. You thin and shorten a little every year. Locate the tallest branch and follow it down inside the shrub to where it meets a lower and shorter lateral. Cut it off there. Repeat with the next tallest branch. Continue until you sense you have gone too far. Quit, then come back next year.



Stop it in its tracks

If the plant in question borders high traffic areas – paths, stairs and such, you might try snapping off the new growth. After the plant has finished blooming you can either pinch out the new end bud, or let the new supple shoot extend and snap it off with your fingers soon thereafter. Landscapers attest that this will not prevent blooming next year, though it is hard to understand why not. It is also exceedingly time consuming and must be done every year to restrict growth.

Arborize

On special occasions a “too-big” rhody can be thinned-up and turned into a nice small tree. The plant in question should be very big and old. It should have a thick, curvaceous trunk. Be sure to meticulously deadwood it as well, and perhaps thin the upper canopy to prevent the “lollypop” look.

Radical renovation

In especially desperate and hopeless situations, it is sometimes appropriate to cut the entire plant nearly to the ground and start over. Like surgery, it is a serious move and you should exhaust other possible solutions first. Sometimes the plant dies. Most often it does not. Renovation works best on old and/or previously mal-pruned shrubs. It will take several years to recover and look like anything again. It will still need almost as much room to live and look good. Do it in early spring. Do not fertilize. Water well throughout the next year.

Adjust your attitude

Most often the only thing a rhododendron is too big for is somebody’s idea of how big it should get to be. In this case, the cheapest and best solution is to learn to appreciate “mature” plants.

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 Bay 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

Carrie Nelson's Garden

Clematis armandii 'Snowflake'

Clematis armandii
'Apple Blossom'

Clematis alpina 'Willy'



Rhododendron augustinii 'Eleanor'

Rhododendron augustinii

Rhododendron 'Azurika'



Rhododendron mallotum

A spectacular red rhododendron for our gardens

Written by Verna Buhler



In gardens, red rhododendrons are striking, and our eyes keep returning to them. It is true with many **red** rhododendrons, that the richness of colour is muted or distorted when photographed. So too, ***Rhododendron mallotum***, a stunning red flowering plant should be seen and touched for its full impact to capture the gardener.

Rhododendron mallotum blooms early, its tubular campanulate, crimson or scarlet flowers held in ball-shaped trusses of 7-15 flowers.

Very special foliage keeps gardeners drawn to it even when its blooms have faded. The plant's



leaves are broadly oblanceolate to ovate, and rugose – rough and deeply textured. They may grow up to 6 inches in length. One most outstanding feature is the dense cinnamon-brown indumentum.

In ten years, it is expected to grow to 3 feet in height, but as is characteristic of so many rhododendrons, continues to reach upward and can grow to shrub or small tree size.

With a hardiness of -15 degrees Celsius, *Rhododendron mallotum* would grow in similar situations as *Rhododendron* 'Malahat'. It prefers light shade with good drainage as does *Rhododendron strigillosum* with its hardiness of -18 degrees Celsius. These two red species could grow happily together.

When Steve Hootman of the Rhododendron Species Foundation, the guru of rhododendrons, indicates a “thumbs-up” and expresses an opinion that *Rhododendron mallotum* is one of the finest species in the genre, I am one of the rhododendron collectors who takes note.

For most part, the information and photos for this short feature were drawn from various sections of the Rhododendron Species Foundation website. The information on the RSF website is accurate and current.

Thank-you, RSF staff.

Sandra's Special Fragrant Rhododendron:

Rhododendron 'Else Frye'



Fragrances in our Gardens Abound:

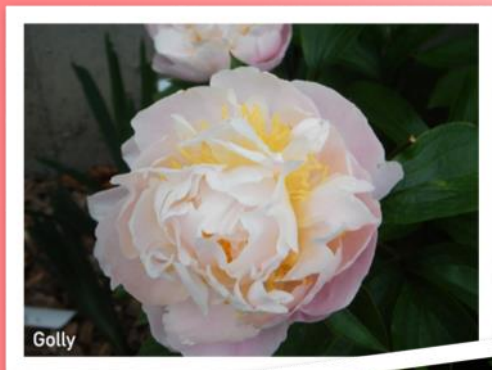
Have you been enjoying the fragrances of bulbs and shrubs that grace our gardens?

A stroll through the garden gifts with drifts of *Hyacinths*, *Narcissus*, *Prunus*, *Daphne*, *Osmanthus x burkwoodii*, *Viburnum* ('Anne Russell'), and *Sarcococca* among others.

Of the rhododendrons, *Rhododendron* 'Else Frye' in Sandra's glasshouse, and Ken Gibson's Tofino garden, and at Verna's *Rhododendron johnstoneanum*, (in a sunroom) and *Rhododendron* 'Alena', *Rhododendron* "Heavenly Scent", *Rhododendron* 'Faggetter's Favourite', and *Rhododendron* 'Coastal Spice' (*Fragrantissimum* x *burmanicum*) x *edgeworthii*) have released their perfumes.

Malcolm Ho's *Paeoneae*:

Speaking of fragrances, Malcolm's *Paeoneae* almost emit perfumes from the pages of the newsletter. "Golly yes!"



Bernie Dinter's Reds:



Rhododendron 'Malahat' thrives at his home on the side of Malahat Mountain,
as does *Rhododendron* 'Grace Seabrook'

Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society Truss Show!

A Truss Plus Show: *"If we can't go to the Rhododendron, the Rhododendron must come to us"*

Contest closes: May 31, 2020

Instructions: Identify your photos as entries to the contest. Send photos of your Rhododendrons, flowers, your garden, your isolated life to:

cowichanvalleyrhododendron@gmail.com

(The newsletter editor notes the many photos you have sent to share, should be contest entries)

Enter as often as you like. We will send out a document to all of you with your photos

Bonuses: a *name* gets you an extra point; the *correct name* is worth 2 points

Prizes: at this point, are virtual

Categories:

- Dwarf Rhododendrons
- Larger Rhododendrons
- Species
- Foliage – Rhodos with especially good foliage, or where foliage is a very attractive feature.
- The "I Haven't a Clue" or "I lost the Label", or even "I Don't Remember Planting This" This would account for the plant being mislabeled and not the colour you thought it was.
- Best Truss in show
- Understory and Companion Plants
- Shrubs
- Perennials
- Mystery Plant (see above category, "I Don't Remember Planting This") This could have the benefit of actually *having your plant identified*.
- Biggest Weed
- Most Isolated Gardener
- Best Gardener Activity in Isolation – Drinking wine counts
- Highest Number of Trowels lost in a Single Season*



**Eventually we could award a lifetime achievement award- The Golden Trowel Award. While the Golden Trowel would be in perpetuity, each awardee would receive a fine stainless-steel trowel fitted with a GPS tracking device, allowing you to pinpoint your trowel's location using your smart phone. Assuming of course you can find that.*

2019-20 Executive

President: Shared/CVRS Executive Team

Vice-President: Diane Allen

Past President: Barrie Agar

Secretary: Verna Buhler

Treasurer: Elaine Kitchen

Members-at-Large: Alan Campbell, Candice Feeney,
Ali Morris, Wendy Wilson

Membership Chair: David Annis, 250-748-1338

Convenors

Sunshine: Mary Gale

Tea: Judeen Hendricksen

Raffle: Hilda Gerrits

Club Liaison: Alan Campbell

Program Committee Co-ordinator: Alan Campbell

Garden Tours/Trips: Al Murray

CV Garden Fair: The Team

Christmas Party: The Team

Library: Verna Buhler

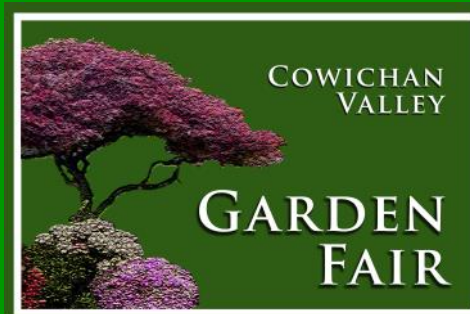
Newsletter Editor: Verna Buhler



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

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

<http://cowichanrhodos.ca>



<http://cowichanvalleygardenfair.com>

Due to COVID-19 the 2020
Garden Fair is cancelled



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CowichanValleyGardenFair](http://www.facebook.com/CowichanValleyGardenFair)

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