

Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

Newsletter

Volume 29:7 October 2018

President's Message

Is it just I who somehow missed experiencing all that September offers gardeners? Where did that lovely month go? The pleasantly warm temperatures, following the week of long awaited rain, has encouraged grass to green to heavy mowing heights, weeds to enthusiastically sprout before the mulch could be distributed, and confused rhododendrons to release some flowers from next spring's buds. Now that the rains have begun and temperatures are dropping, the rest should patiently wait for several months before springing their floral surprises.

Our minds may be able to move forward from garden survival efforts into planning for next season. Several of us have begun discussing next year's Plant Fair. It may seem a touch premature perhaps, but **it really isn't too early to begin assembling the Plant Fair Planning Committee.** The Plant Fair is a huge un-

Guest Speaker: Bill Dumont

South Africa Tour 2017

Wed, Oct 3 @ 7:30pm

(More details on page 2)

Tea Service - Oct 3

Judeen's Group (last names
alphabetically Evans thru Kennedy)

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dertaking and many willing volunteers have been making this event better each year. The impetus for continued growth means a call-out to you now to add your name to serve on the committee. We have found that individuals bring special skills to the Planning Team for tasks that otherwise are left floundering.

Thank you so very much for your help in the past. Can we count on you again for 2019?

Remember, those meetings are really a blast---we mainly eat and laugh---if I recall correctly!

Thank you so much,

Barrie Agar, President

GARDEN FAIR 2019

Planning Notes (June 2018)

- Book Mellor Hall: **DONE!**
- Planning Committee: Keep same team if possible – varied skills and talents, respectful cooperative group, team-players
- Solicit more Gold Sponsors
- Vendors: Limit to 6 garden related products
- Maintain “airport” lineup for checkout
- Review advertising/signage
- One more cashier
- One more in Accounting
- Ensure Tag Quality

Wednesday, October 3

Guest Speaker, Bill

South Africa Gardens, Sights Politics and Ecology

September 13 to October 4, 2017



Bill Dumont has prepared an interesting and entertaining presentation on his **Dumont Tours** trip to South Africa last fall with 22 guests. Bill is a retired professional forester, a long time CRVS member and Secretary -Treasurer of the BC Iris Society and has been organising and conducting local and international tours for many decades. He just returned this past weekend from 5 week-long

tours of Haida Gwaii and is planning a very special tour of the Holy Land's Gardens and Sights in May 2019. He will also do a couple of Haida Gwaii tours next year and is working on a tour of gardens in Ireland and Scotland in 2020.

His South Africa tour was highly rated by participants and included visits to almost 40 gardens and several wildlife safaris in this beautiful and interesting country. Arriving in their early spring the annuals and perennials were just starting to bloom. The very rich ecosystems ranging from deserts to lush subtropical gardens and the rare, rich and unique Fynbos floral kingdom dominated by Proteas and ericaceae were visited along with the Game Parks. The gardens in South Africa date from the 1600s and many are world famous. Come and enjoy this tour of Bill's visit to South Africa in 2017.

Letter *from the Editor*



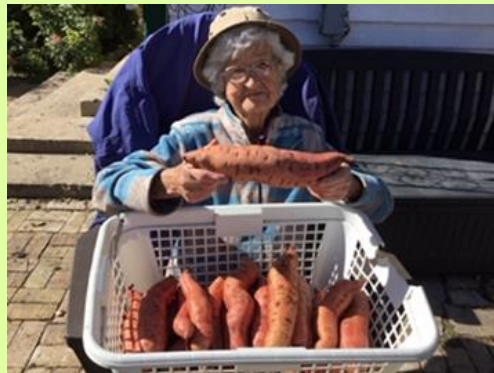
Finally all this beautiful rain, Friends! How wonderful!

Have any of you caught yourselves looking out and thinking, "Oh no, it's rainy season. I miss the sun and heat"? Shameful of us, isn't it?

What a bountiful season for fruit, berries, nuts, flowers, and vegetables this has been, and still is! On our small farm here on Cowichan Lake Road, we have been unable to properly manage this productivity. For example, our pears trees have over-gifted this season to the point that the freezer contains 25 liters of apple pear juice; McBarley's is fermenting our batch of raspberry-pear cider; the pantry displays twenty jars of pepper-pear salsa; our refrigerator holds three trays of Bartlett and Seckle pears for nibbling and cooking; and the tree is still heavy with Anjou and Seckle pears. Friends have had enough too.

Yes, I know, there are many lovely pear recipes on the Internet, but one half of the farm staff has left. He has taken Kubo and run off to the mainland. He couldn't stand her being over there without him. She keeps him happy. Granted, I miss her too, but someone has to stay to feed the dogs and run the farm.

It is super challenging to attack the morning-glory-controlled area of the yard, scheduled for restoration this very fall, without Kubo. Thank goodness we lost over half of our wine grapes to a powdery mildew or virus this year. Harvesting and de-stemming enough grapes for two batches of wine was more than



enough! I know that squash and zucchini are generally fine additions to compost---we could only sell a few of the hundreds of patty-pans at our farm gate because the road construction meant for pilot car pacing and dangerous roadside parking thru out the summer. Seriously, there just isn't enough time for harvest and sports!

We aren't the only ones "suffering" from plenty! My mother, who will be ninety in just a few weeks, proudly presents the first sweet potato crop she, together with my amazing sister, has ever grown---this, in Manitoba. My mother is one of the most competitive gardeners I have ever met; needless to say, she was thrilled!

In truth, I am happy that George has run off to the mainland to help my son with a building project. Retirement has been hard on George, so if he is happy so am I.

Rhododendrons? Yes, of course . . .

In this newsletter you will find some information on *Rhododendron* Triflora; Ian presents a challenge to identify a lovely mystery plant; we, club members, have a propagating challenge.

Back to bounty---I cannot express how incredibly fortunate and grateful I am for so many blessings! I have so much to be thankful for, and hopefully you do as well.

Happy Thanksgiving,
Verna



George and Kubo sharing their happiness with George's grandson, Alex.

T is for *Triflora*

This article was written by Norm Todd, in March 2002, with photos added by Verna Buhler to depict the author's Triflora garden grouping.

With five plants, one can have a five-month succession of colour. Since expense is not a consideration in this imagery, let's add around the perimeter of the grouping a clump of each of the smallest of the *Triflora* --- *R. hanceanum* and *R. keiskei*.



Rhododendron yunnanense

The easiest thing to do is make a lumpy white sauce. The second easiest thing to do is to grow *Triflora* rhododendrons. The third easiest thing to do is to ignore the *Triflora* rhododendrons.

The *Triflora* (three flowers) has been a neglected Section of the *Rhododendron* genus in most gardens on Vancouver Island. The best know group is *R. augustinii*. Still it is not a plant that one can find in an average nursery. A potential buyer of a rhododendron will trip over a slew of 'Unique' and 'Jean Marie' without sighting one species of the *Triflora*.

The *Triflora* Subsection of the scaly leafed rhododendrons (Lepidotes) is a large and important group that is centered in Western China. Most get to be quite tall and with their smaller narrow leaves, have a slender, willowy look. Many of them have flowers, not only at the end of the branches, but

also in the axils of the topmost leaves, so they put on a big show when in bloom. Interestingly, many of the *Triflora* have more than the basic number of chromosomes. This is termed **polyploidy**. Some have twice the normal 26 chromosomes and some three times. Cox says this limits the amount of hybridization that can take place among those with different counts.

I warm to some plants in the garden in no small part because of their association with where I got the plant, or who gave it to me, or because of the plant's history of discovery and introduction. *Rhododendron augustinii* commemorates Augustine Henry. There are reports that Dr. Henry may not have been the wittiest of plantsmen, (the spouse of one weekend host of Henry's always found excuses to be absent from his endless boring botanical litanies), but he knew his stuff. Trained as a medical doctor, initially in his native Ireland and then at Edinburgh, he joined the Chinese Maritime Customs. After a year at Shanghai, he was sent to Ichang (Yichang) on the Yangtze as assistant medical officer where for long periods of time he was bored out of his wits. "Oh, if you knew the weariness of an exile's life. I have become a great collector of plants, and after exhausting the neighbourhood I thought of going into the mountains, so I spent six months in two journeys into the interior."



Probably the greatest of Henry's legacies was the introduction of the handkerchief tree (*Davidia involucrata*). Henry didn't collect plants; he preserved herbarium specimens (5000 species) and after following up the French missionary Pere David's original discovery of the handkerchief tree, it was his specimens that stimulated the English nursery Veitch to send out Ernest Henry Wilson to bring it back to England and subsequently to North America.

Henry, on retiring from the Orient, took up the position of Professor of Forestry at Dublin and had a second career, which testifies to his intellect and industry. So I like *R. augustinii*. (There is also a *R. henry*, which is said not to be in cultivation. It is related to *R. latouchere*, which was recently introduced by Peter Wharton). To me, the plant *augustinii* fills one's senses with more than a flowing cascade of "blue".

The colour of *augustinii* ranges from white to wine. The "blue" forms of *augustinii* are not seen as frequently in gardens as they should be but the other shades are downright rare. I have a clone called "Burgundy" and that will bloom for me for the first time this year. "Marine" is one of the most popular of the *augustiniis* being quite deep coloured, almost purple but I like the paler ones every bit as much. There are a couple of very good specimens in the University Gardens.

There is also no doubt that the colour of *augustinii* varies from garden to garden. Ernie Lythgoe experienced this sensitivity many years ago. He admired a plant of *augustinii* in Vern Ahyers' garden. Carefully he nurtured a cutting to flowering size only to be disappointed in the muddiness of the blue. Soil has a big effect.

Similarly, the books say, has temperature. The colder the winter, it is claimed, the more red in the blue. After several years of casual, unscientific observation, I decided that the "blueness" had more to do with the then Prime Minister Mulroney's standing in the opinion polls than winter temperature.



***Rhodoendron lutescens* (February)**

The first of the *Triflora* to bloom in spring --- in February --- is the yellow-flowered *R. lutescens*. Under-plant *lutescens* with the dark purple form of *Helleborus orientalis* and the green flowered *Helleborus foetidus* and some early flowering daffodils and perhaps a few primulas and call for Van Gogh.

Then next to *lutescens*, plant its cousin, the pink March blooming *R. davidsonianum*. The clone, 'Ruth Lyons' has no markings in her throat --- regarded by some connoisseurs as a mark of purity --- but I like the ones with the jewels on their throats just as well.



***Rhododendron augustinii* ssp. *augustinii*
(April)**



***Rhododendron davidsonianum* (March)**

Continuing this theme of tall willowy exclamation marks, plant the April flowering *augustinii* and the white flowering *R. rigidum* side by side. There is the very good form of the latter that I got from Greers. This has a tennis ball sized truss of 6 or 8 snowy flowers, (thus stretching the name *Triflora*, even for a taxonomist) and dark chocolate anthers.



***Rhododendron rigidum* (May)**



***Rhododendron trichanthum* (June)**

The resplendence of rhododendrons is not complete without the inclusion of the latest of the *Triflora* to bloom --- *R tricanthum*. I think the best forms of *tricanthum* are the deep purple ones. This extends the floral show to mid June.

With five plants, one can have a five-month succession of colour. Since expense is not a consideration in this imagery, let's add around the perimeter of the grouping a clump of each of the smallest of the *Triflora* --- *R. hanceanum* and *R. keiskei*. *Rhododendron hanceanum* makes a great border plant, seldom getting more than 30 cm in height but twice as wide. Its April creamy flowers are openly out-facing and numerous. These match the bronzy new foliage so well that even Oak Bay gardeners cannot complain of any tonal disharmony. The tiny form of *R. keiskei* 'Yaku Fairy' is the best known and is certainly a gem but there are larger forms that might be more suited to our *Triflora* extravaganza.



Rhododendron keiskei* var. *keiskei



Rhododendron hanceanum



Rhododendron yunnanense

As an aside I was told that the way to grow R. keiskei 'Yaku Fairy' is in a pot. Every year knock the plant out and add another 2cm of soil in the pot. 'Yaku Fairy' will spill over the rim of the pot cascading down the sides to form a splendid wig.

For those with space and who like to develop a theme to its most replete, one of the easiest to please of all the *Triflora* is *yunnanense*. Reportedly it has a very wide geographical distribution and a large altitudinal range. It varies in flower from white through pink to pale purple. I think the form with white flowers and coral markings is probably the best. I find that *yunnanense* is one of these shrubs that is taken for granted like some conifers or spireas. It is an essential element in the landscape but assumes a kind of complementary demeanour.

The collector can add the whimsically named *ambiguum* – an easy doer with soft yellow flowers in April/ May. There is also an interesting multi-coloured form of the type species *triflorum*. The cream flowers are suffused with red and pink and green. At this point I have to add that probably the least garden worthy of all rhododendrons in my garden is a *triflorum*. Its flowers are the same insipid colour as the leaves; it is an aesthetic disaster. The reason I keep this plant is not for any horticultural or botanical interest, but for human interest. If any visitor notices the flowers she is immediately elected to my Growers' Hall of Fame. However, this plant is the exception – most are fully worthy of the space they occupy.

For recreating the landscape, or for the new gardener, but especially for the gardener who has had some unsatisfactory experiences with rhododendrons, there are plants out there that deserve your attention, 'Tis a lesson you should heed,

Try, try again.
If at first you don't succeed,
TRIFLORA.

On September 2, 2018, the CVRS received a lovely response, as follows, from Ray Johnson regarding his letter posted in our newsletter.

Verna,

Thank you very much for your help by publicizing my inquiry about the former Shaw property. Ian has been very quick to respond and we now have a thriving conversation underway. His friend, Sandra, has even already contacted the current owners of the property. It sounds as if they may not be keen on random visitors.

Henceforth I will read your newsletter to see if perhaps a visit by a small group, under CVSR auspices, becomes possible sometime next year. If news of such an event cannot be made public, would you please let me know the date nonetheless? I would be happy to participate as a visitor who has come all the way from Alaska just to see the garden. My fantasy of seeing the Shaw property again is fast maturing into concrete ambition. Thanks again for all of your help with this quest.

Sincerely,

Ray Johnson

My Favourite Mystery Plant

Ian E. Efford



Almost all of us have a plant that we really enjoy but have no idea what it is! This can arise because it was in the garden when you acquired the property, you have lost the label, your memory is “slipping”, or you received it from a friend, but you did not grasp the name and were embarrassed to ask for it to be repeated! Quite frequently, newly acquired plants have incorrect labels. Recently, someone [not a CVRS member] asked me whether to plant Horizon Monarch in full sun or heavy shade. The conversation went well until she mentioned its very small leaves. The plant is obviously mislabeled.

My favourite mystery plant came from Norman Todd’s clearance sale and was labelled *R. annae*. It grew well in a shady spot and turned out to have a very leggy form with drooping branches. At about a metre in height it started to produce some loose trusses with attractive, quite large, pink-red flowers. I was very impressed by the flowers and the plant overall. Foolishly, I decided to look up the species in two or three authoritative books! Obviously, it is not *R. annae*.

R. annae is described as having cream-white flowers and leaves that are rather long with a pointed apex. My plant has larger, rounder leaves. I discovered that Finnerty Garden at the University of Victoria has *R. annae* and went down to see it. The leaves are quite different, narrow, and rather “hard”, and the plant is a small compact tree. In

nature, this species comes in three forms that are found in S.W. China at altitudes ranging from 2,000 to 11,000 feet. In appearance, the leaves of the Finnerty tree suggest that it is from a higher part of this range where it is sometimes exposed to wind and cold. Over two or three years, I visited this plant in order to see the flowers but it did not have flowers or even buds. Finally, however, it did flower and they are rather tight white flowers held close to the stem, which could not be described in any way as in loose trusses.





That leaves us with a rather nice mystery plant. What is it? I have asked some of the experts on the Island to no avail. It is growing well despite the drought and will have a special place in our new garden but it feels a little out of place without a name! Can you help? All suggestions will be welcome.

If you have a favorite mystery plant, write a short article for the newsletter and someone might identify it!



Propagating Rhododendrons from Stem Cuttings

Sandra Stevenson, Cowichan Valley RS

Note: This article was written by Sandra for the Vancouver Island Master Gardeners.

Supplies: Cuttings (scions), secateurs or sharp knife, clean starting medium, pot, plastic bag, chopstick, label

Why propagate rhododendrons from cuttings?

This vegetative method of propagation produces plants that are identical to the “Mother Plant”. It will allow you to start a number of plants from your favorite rhododendron for minimal cost. Keep in mind that some rhododendrons root much more readily than others. You can have success in anywhere from six weeks to a number of years; with some cuttings you may have no success at all, but it is fun trying.

When to choose your cuttings?

Most cuttings of *Rhododendron hymenanthus* can be taken as semi-hardwood to hardwood cuttings. In this climate that would be when the tissue is nearly firm from September to November. You can take the cuttings earlier but the weather is friendlier once fall arrives. If you do take the cuttings in August, remember to keep them moist and not to let the cuttings cook in their little domes. If you are propagating *Rhododendron pentanthera*, also known as deciduous azaleas, the timing for collecting differs from

subgenus *hymenanthes*. Take the cuttings when the new growth is young and pliable. This coincides in a number of cases with flowering in early June. These can be much trickier to grow from this method.

Method of propagating tip cuttings:

Begin by choosing some tip cuttings from your rhododendron. (Approximately 1" to 4" long) Cuts taken from closer to the root ball or shoots that have grown in shaded areas (etiolation) of the plant appear to root more readily. (Rational: thin cuttings require less energy to maintain them; therefore, excess food can be directed toward the rooting zone. Cuts from nearer the root ball have more hormones concentrated in the area. This too will enhance rooting.) Do not use growth with buds, or remove the buds to have the nourishment redirected to producing roots rather than developing the bud.

Remove lower leaves and cut upper leaves in half to provide more room and better air circulation when planted. Carbohydrates required to nourish the leaves will be redirected to once again enhance root formation. Good air circulation will ensure carbon dioxide does not build up and reduce photosynthesis abilities. Be cautious because too much air will reduce humidity and also reduce foliage need for feed while the scion is directing energy into producing roots. Cut a wound at each side of the base of the cutting, approximately ½" to 1", to expose the cambium layer. Dip the cuttings in rooting hormone (I use #2). This replicates auxin, the hormone that makes rooting easier. You can root without rooting hormone as well. It's fun to experiment with and without rooting hormone.

What type of soil do I use?

Use new bark, clean peat (coarse if possible), Perlite or coarse clean sand. The goal is to have a medium that has some humus (bark or peat) to hold moisture and an inert matter (perlite or sand) to

provide air spaces and drainage. Make a hole in the soil with a stick or pencil. This will allow the rooting hormone to stay in place when sinking the cutting. Ensure at least one node on the stem is below soil line. Gently press and firm soil around cutting.

What environment do my rhododendron cuttings prefer?

The best results are realized if you use bottom heat kept constant at 70 F. Keep in mind many cuttings will root without bottom heat. Mist foliage to keep it moist and avoid a situation that is too wet or soggy. Cover containers with plastic to keep moisture in and increase the humidity. Keep cuttings out of direct sun light. I generally will plant about six cuttings in a one-gallon pot, cover the pot with a shower cap, and place on the north side of my house. Now and again I check to make sure it is moist and lift plastic cap to provide an exchange of air. I have moderate success with little need for too much attention.

How do I know if my rhododendron cuttings have rooted?

Some Rhododendron cuttings root easily within about six weeks, and others may take up to a year or more. Tug gently on the root to determine if you meet with resistance. If you feel resistance, roots have taken hold.

Reference: Greer's Guidebook to Available Rhododendrons – Species and Hybrids,

Third Edition; Harold E. Greer

Thanks to Sandra Stevenson, Cowichan Valley RS and Vancouver Island Master Gardeners

Selecting the Best Cuttings for Rhododendron Propagation

PROPAGATION CLUB WORKSHOP and PLANNING MEETING

Date: Saturday, October 13, 2018 10:30am to 12:30pm (at least)

Venue: Verna's - CVRS Propagator & 2018 plants site / Wide range of plant development for workshop demonstrations

Purpose:

- **Tally the total number of plants** that CVRS now has in stock and where they are located
- **Review** last season's effort
- **Brainstorm** issues / ideas for improvement
- **Make plans** for 2018/19:

Propagator site and adaptations for 2018/19

- **Basic prep for new season** - Clean pots, mix starter mix (if it stays at Verna's place)
- **Workshop: "Taking the Best Cuttings"** presented by Barrie Agar
 - Identify the most viable cuttings to take on a wide variety of plants
- **Set date(s)** for the cutting and planting activity
- **Plan a "Gathering Cuttings"** Trip (Finnerty Gardens, etc)

Please note that this *will not be* a planting activity. We have planned this preparatory meeting and workshop to ensure greater success in selecting viable cuttings. We will establish a date for planting cuttings at this meeting.

What to Bring:

Old clothes to work in to bleach pots and mix soil for the season's cuttings

List of CVRS plants you may have been "**growing on**" from the first season for the tally. Please include those that Joe Hudak gave you, on a 50/50 basis: half to keep and half to grow for the club.

Great ideas for development of the club

Willingness to volunteer for a role in the club such as "*Keeper of the List*" or "*Trip Planner*"



Glendoick cuttings taking root

Calendar of Upcoming Events

**Wednesday October 3, 2018;
7:30 pm**

CVRS Monthly Meeting; Guest speaker: Bill Dumont “ South African Gardens, Sights, Politics and Ecology



**Saturday October 13, 2018;
10:30 am – 12:30 pm**

“Selecting the Best Cuttings for Rhododendron Propagation”
Workshop and Propagating Club Planning Meeting (3908 Cowichan Lake Road)

Thursday October 18, 2018; 2:00 pm

Book Club Meeting, CVRS Library (3908 Cowichan Lake Road)

Sunday, October 28, 2018; 10:00 am – 4:00 pm

2018 Special Fall Conference ‘Navigating Garden Myths’

February 2, 2019

Mixing It Up "Beauty & the Beast"

Saturday, April 27, 2019

Cowichan Valley Garden Fair

2018-19 Executive

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

Vice President: Ali Morris

Past President:

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

Treasurer: Elaine Kitchen
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Membership Chair: David Annis

Directors at Large:
Diane Allen, Alan Campbell, Ron Martin,
Elizabeth Zoffman

Convenors

Sunshine: Mary Gale

Tea: Judeen Hendricksen

Raffle: Hilda Gerrits

Club Liaison: Alan Campbell

Library: Verna Buhler

Membership Recruitment: Peter Lewis

Program Committee Co-ordinator: Alan Campbell

History: Ian Efford

Garden Tours/Trips: Al Murray

CV Garden Fair: The Team

Facility Liaison: Roy Elvins

Christmas Party: The Team



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

A Chapter of the American
Rhododendron Society
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<http://cowichanrhodos.ca>



April 27, 2019; 10 am - 2 pm
<http://cowichanvalleygardenfair.com>



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