



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

Newsletter

Volume 34:7 October 2023

Message from the President

A recent visit to a special garden in Oregon State, recently, has reminded me of the transformative power of our gardens and green spaces. In increasingly urbanized living spaces these spaces provide a link to the natural world that is sadly lacking in most town and city settings. The garden in question is the Memorial Healing Garden and is situated within the walls of the Oregon State Penitentiary, it is an oasis of calm and beauty amidst the concrete and wire. It was designed by Hoichi Kurisu and constructed by the adults in custody with the assistance of experts in Japanese Gardens. The maintenance of this space is done by the AICs of the OSP. It includes raked sand areas, a waterfall, pines, azaleas, and a koi pond which attracts other creatures to the water. A family of ducks is a miracle to be cherished.

The positive effects are much more than just the calming areas of the space, and escape from the ever-present walls and bars. The development of new skills, understanding of the symbolism of the gardens, and the sense of community in the creation of the garden has made huge changes in their lives.

We are lucky here -- we have no shortage of natural areas. Indeed, I often feel I am battling nature rather than working with it. However, no matter what our gardens look like, they are our own personal Paradises, our return to Eden. My friend in Vancouver thought being able to see the deer wander through the garden outside my door was wonderful.

I am beginning to think she is right.

Barrie Agar

CVRS Meeting

**Wednesday,
October 4, 2023
7pm**

**Guest Speaker:
Margot Moser**

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Banner Photo:

*Rhododendron with stunning
indumentum and tomentum*



"It is an amazing place. It is a place of freedom inside a prison." J Giggy

(Photo: Gallery at memorialhealinggarden.org)

CVRS Membership Renewal

Fees for 2023 – 2024:

- **Adult Membership: \$40** (includes family at the same address)
- **Associate Membership: \$10**

Payment Methods:

- **E-transfer** (preferred method as it goes directly into the CVRS bank account) Email to:
cowichanvalleyrhododendron@gmail.com
- **Exact payment** at Wednesday Monthly Meetings: Submit a cheque or exact cash to David Annis, CVRS Membership Chair.
- **Mail a cheque payable to CVRS:** Mail to [David Annis](#),
[5974 Tower Place, Duncan, B.C. V9L 0E1](#)
- **Deliver Payment to David Annis's address:** Contact David before leaving payment to ensure he is at home.
[Call: \(250-710-4945 cell\)](#)

Margot Moser

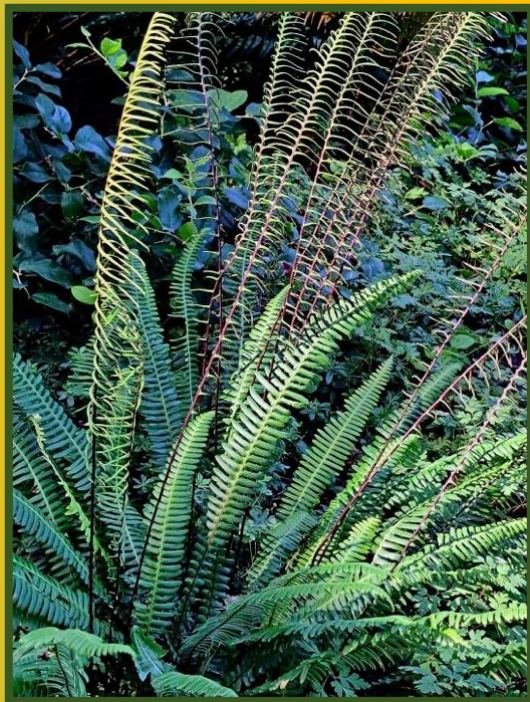
Small Ferns for Gardens and Rockeries

Wednesday, October 4, 2023, 7pm

at the new CVRS meeting location

THE HUB

2375 Koksilah Road, Duncan, B.C.



"I have loved gardening for as long as I remember and have always been a sponge for any and all garden-related information I have ever heard. Besides what I have learned from others and from my own experience, I have done lots of reading and taken many gardening courses – the most instructive being the Master Gardening course at Van Dusen Gardens over 25 years ago. Inspired by the MG Manual, I designed a garden journal, '*My Growing Gardenbook*' which sold over 8000 copies. My current garden in NanOOSE Bay is on a very dry south-facing hillside where I find that the adaptability of ferns makes them easy to grow even in poor conditions."

~ Margot Moser

Small Ferns for Gardens and Rockeries

Ferns are a great asset to most any garden. There are ferns that grow in virtually all locations from sunny and dry to shady and wet. This presentation will introduce about 30 beautiful small ferns for a wide range of placements in your garden. Many species are native to BC but popular cultivars will also be included.



BC Native Dwarf Fern Preferences

(selected list)

	Evergreen	Semi-shade to full shade	Semi-shade to full sun	Needs moist, well-drained soil	Tolerates dryness (not drought)	Both sterile & fertile fronds	Spreading rhizomes	Benefits from extra calcium	Deer / rabbit resistant
<i>Adiantum aleuticum</i> 'Imbricatum' Dwarf Maidenhair Fern		X		X					
<i>Adiantum capillus-veneris</i> Southern Maidenhair Fern		X		X				X	
<i>Aspidotis densa</i> Lace Fern	X		X		X	X			
<i>Asplenium trichomanes</i> Maidenhair Spleenwort	X	X		X				X	
<i>Cryptogramma acrostichoides</i> Parsley Fern	X		X	X		X			
<i>Gymnocarpium dryopteris</i> Oak Fern		X		X			X		
<i>Pentagramma triangularis</i> Goldenback Fern	X		X		X	X			X
<i>Polypodium glycyrrhiza</i> Licorice Fern	X		X		X		X	X	
<i>Polypodium hesperium</i> Western Polypody	X		X		X		X	X	
<i>Polystichum imbricans</i> Narrow-leaved Sword Fern	X		X		X				X
<i>Struthiopteris spicant</i> Deer Fern	X	X		X		X			
<i>Thelypteris phegopteris</i> Narrow Beech Fern		X		X			X		

NOTE: These are growing preferences I have observed and been able to research. Not promises. It's always a good idea to keep an eye on any new plant for at least the first year to make sure it's growing the way you would expect. With our weather becoming more and more unpredictable, even some native plants are having trouble adjusting to changing conditions.

https://www.mun.ca/botgarden/learn/Dwarf_Ferns_for_the_Garden.pdf

Prepared by Margot Moser

BC Native Dwarf Fern

From Margot Moser's Handout



Adiantum aleuticum 'Imbricatum'

Dwarf Maidenhair Fern

(Photo: mooreandmooreplants.co.uk)



Adiantum capillus-veneris

Southern Maidenhair Fern



Aspidotis densa

Lace Fern (aka, Indian's Dream)

(Photo:

https://www.inaturalist.org/guide_taxa/724103)



Asplenium trichomanes

Maidenhair Spleenwort

(Native in Margot's garden)



Struthiopteris spicant

Deer Fern

(formerly *Blechnum spicant*)

(Photo: Hansen's Northwest Native Plant Database)



Cryptogramma acrostichoides

Parsley Fern

(Photo: Courtesy Alan Cressler, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center)



Gymnocarpium dryopteris

Oak Fern

(Photo from:

<https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org>)

Pentagramma triangularis

Goldenback Fern

(Photo from Margot's garden)



Polypodium glycyrrhiza

Licorice Fern

(Photo from Margot's garden)

Polypodium hesperium

Western Polypody

(Photo from Margot's garden)



Polystichum imbricans

Narrow-leaved Sword Fern

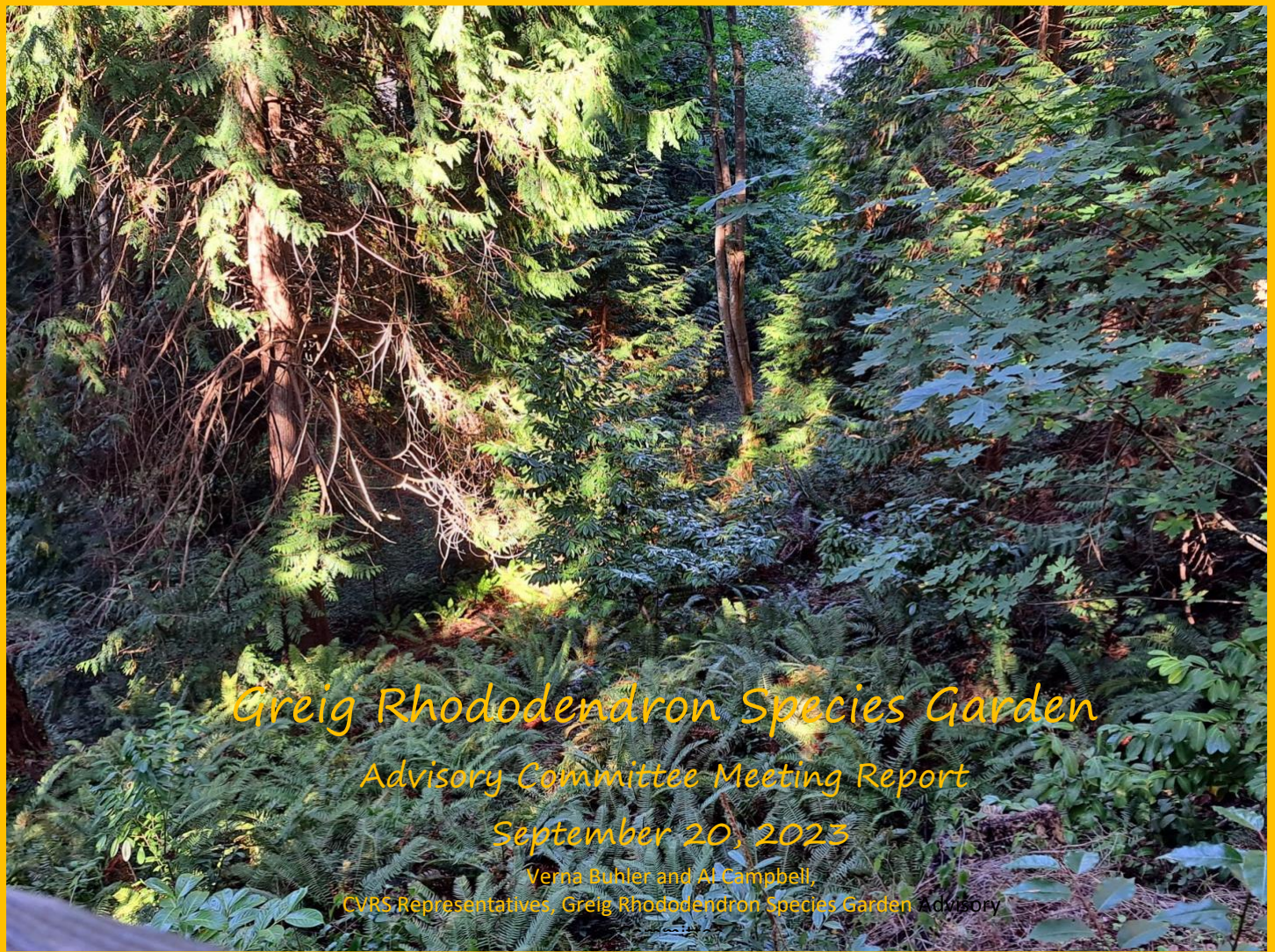
(Photo from Margot's garden)

Thelypteris phegopteris

Narrow Beech Fern

(Photo:from Adolf Ceska;
E-floraBC)

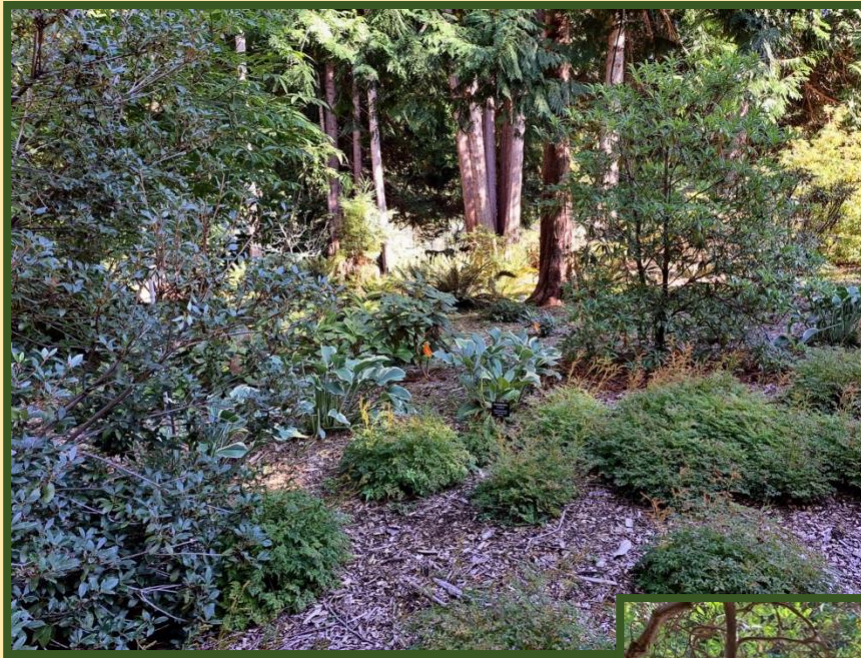




With this photo report, it is our hope that you come to experience the Rhododendron Species Garden project at Milner Gardens as a worthy, long-term investment for our families and generations in the future. (Photos: Verna Buhler)

Following an introduction by John Deniseger, and the Treasurer's Report and Budget, committee members received an Update on Phase 1. Pam Murray presented a sample of signage for the Phase 1 area; temporary signage is in place and feedback was invited. Geoff explained the plans for benches, and that using different coloured wood chips, secondary pathways would soon be installed in the garden. Marilyn Dawson said that mulching bees would begin shortly to prepare the garden for winter.

Information on Phase 2, the Big Leaf Species Garden followed. Retired landscape architect and outdoor enthusiast, Jim Cadwaladr, made a lengthy and thorough presentation to the Advisory Committee. Using three large preliminary architectural landscape drawings, Jim explained the progress that he, a volunteer, and several geotechnical engineers had made since the committee's last meeting in February. He explained the results of the studies in terms of soil structure, degree of slope, drainage, and retention of the area that will be Phase 2 of the Greig Rhododendron Species Garden. Together with arborists, Jim and Geoff Ball identified and recorded the characteristics of each tree in the area, tagged trees that were weak, dying and dangerous for removal, and those that are considered special or specimen trees.

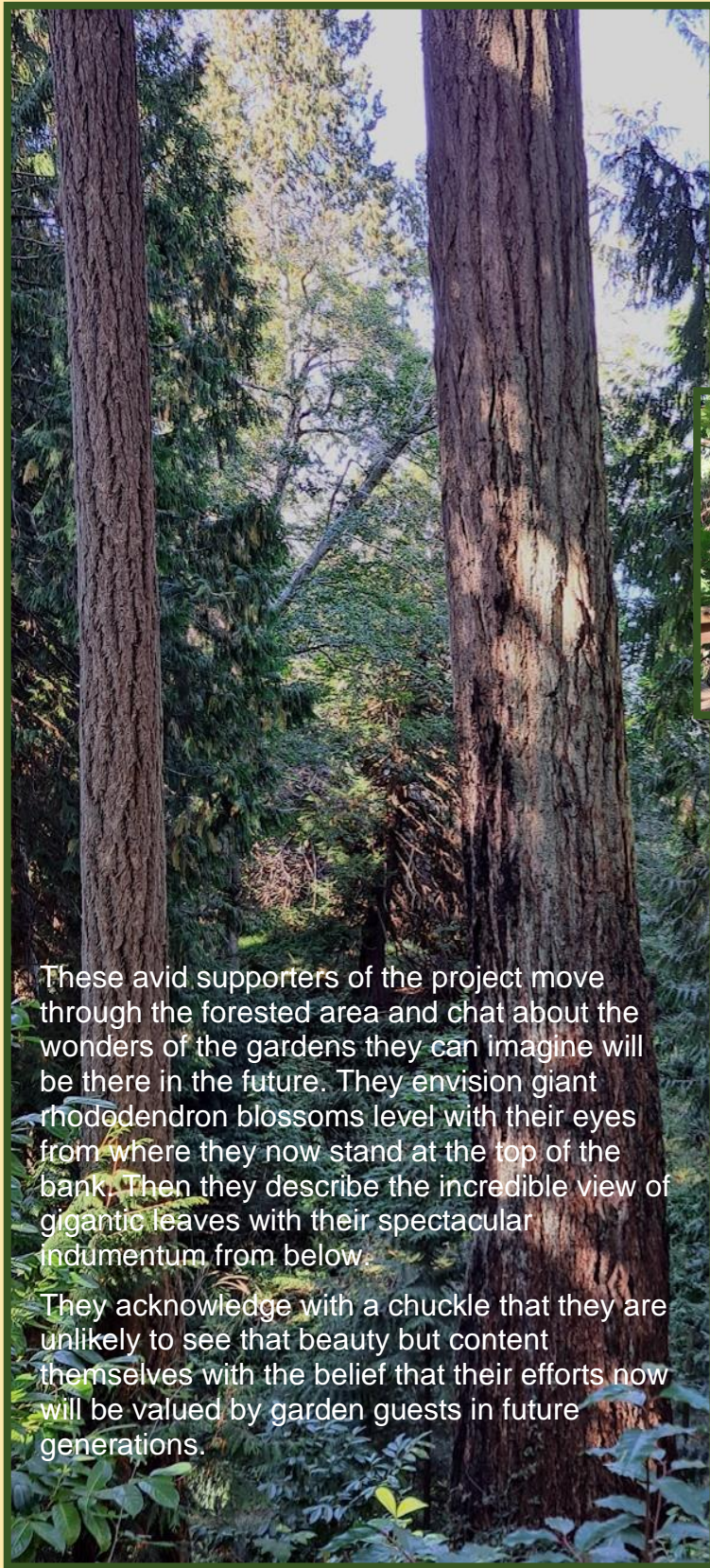


Following the indoor presentation, Jim led committee members through the Phase 2 area.



The entire Phase 2 area is very near the size of the Phase 1 area. Much of this area, however, is on the bank to the ocean; work will be done to build wattled "platforms" for planting the large leaf rhododendrons. Work on the large level section will begin first, with tree removal and minor clearing consistent with the Phase 1 section.

Special views of the ocean and beach will be preserved or enhanced.



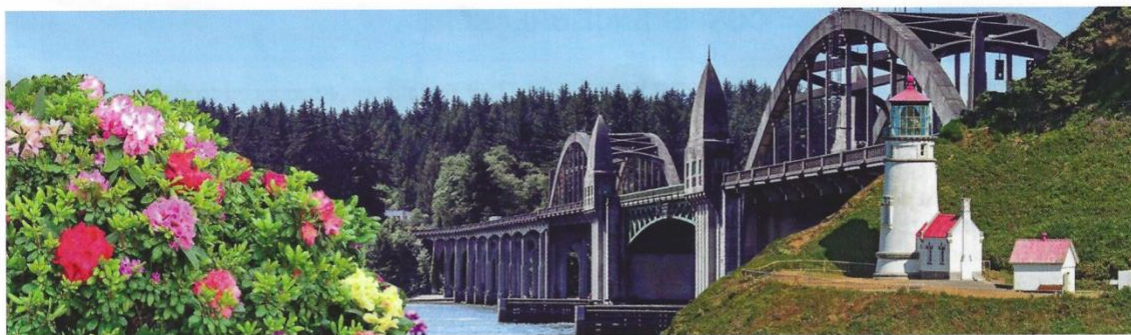
These avid supporters of the project move through the forested area and chat about the wonders of the gardens they can imagine will be there in the future. They envision giant rhododendron blossoms level with their eyes from where they now stand at the top of the bank. Then they describe the incredible view of gigantic leaves with their spectacular indumentum from below.

They acknowledge with a chuckle that they are unlikely to see that beauty but content themselves with the belief that their efforts now will be valued by garden guests in future generations.



It was moving to see the sparkle in Jim's eyes, as he asked quietly of a few of us who stood with him among the ferns and trees, "It's just beautiful, isn't it? I love the forests. And can you imagine?"

Jim is unquestionably the right person to design the garden.



2023 FALL WESTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE

FLORENCE COASTAL SPICE

OCTOBER 19-21

Thursday, Oct. 19

An evening of Renewing old Acquaintances and making New Friends over Local Wines, Beer, or Soft Beverages.

Friday, Oct. 20

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 8:00 – 9:00 | Greeting
Plant Sale and Silent auction |
| 9:00 – 9:45 | Jack Olson – My Favorite
Flowers |
| 10:00 – 10:45 | Sandi Jensen – Fuchsias |
| 11:00 – 11:45 | Day Farrald – Geriatric Hybrids
– Around Forever |
| 11:45 – 1:15 | Lunch, Plant Sales, and Silent
Auction |
| 1:15 – 2:00 | Mike Bamford, Eastern VP
Deciduous Azaleas |
| 2:15 – 3:00 | Augie Bergman – Rhody Wood |
| 3:15 – 4:00 | Will Clawson – Rhododendron
Species Botanical Garden |
| 4:00 – 6:00 | Plant Sale and
Silent Auction |
| 5:00 – 6:00 | Social Hour/Wine, Beer, Pop |
| 6:00 – 7:00 | Dinner |
| 7:00 – 8:00 | Log Cabin Nursery – Ops by
Lorrie Zeller |

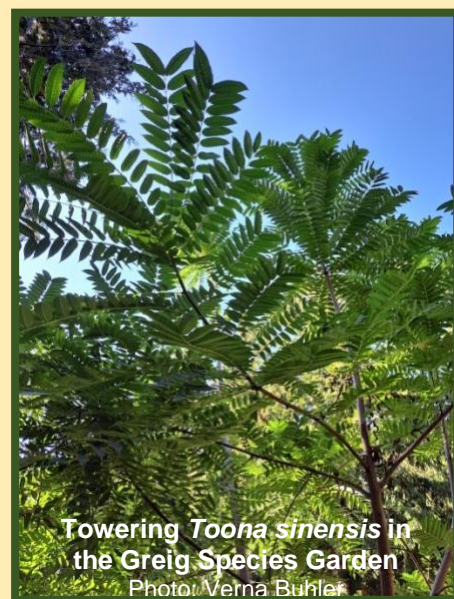
Saturday, Oct. 21

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 8:00 – 9:00 | Greeting
Plant Sale and Silent auction |
| 9:00 – 9:45 | Jack Olson – Foliage and
Buds |
| 10:00 – 10:45 | Mark Akimoff - Bulbs |
| 11:00 – 11:45 | Mike Bones – Siuslaw Chapter
Shows and Gardens |
| 11:45 – 1:15 | Lunch, Plant Sales, and Silent
Auction |
| 1:15 – 2:00 | Linda Derkach, ARS Pres. – Your
Chapter and you |
| 2:15 – 3:00 | Ryan Contreras - Hybridizing |
| 3:15 – 4:00 | Atsuko Gibson – RSBG.
Expeditions to Japan |
| 4:00 – 5:00 | Silent Auction |
| 4:00 – 6:00 | Plant Sale |
| 5:00 – 6:00 | Social Hour/Wine, Beer, Pop |
| 6:00 – 7:00 | Dinner |
| 7:00 – 8:00 | Richard Flavell – Big Leaf
Species |
| 8:00 -9:00 | Purchase & pick up Silent
Auction items |

Letter from the Editor

Hi Friends,

The gardens are still wonderfully green, but here and there a few contrasting red and yellow leaves flag that Nature's artist is beginning another spectacular painting. For some of us, this is a favourite time of year. There are still many blooms in our gardens. Rhododendrons are making strong re-blooming efforts. Isn't it refreshing to see fresh raindrops sparkle on roses as they respond to the cooler, moist conditions that they love?



Drizzly days interspersed with the sunny days do much to lift us from a fatigue, and perhaps melancholy, that touched our spirits after such a lengthy drought. Speaking of melancholy, the stories of bees' lives and their struggles always make me sad. I have included a very brief article about bees experiencing Fall. Help the bees by sending your observations of digging bees to [Queen Quest](#) set up as a link in the article. Hopefully, the other articles in this newsletter, however, will contribute to an uplifting and positive sense of well-being as days shorten and nights lengthen.

This month, you will find information from beyond our immediate chapter to the bigger view of our rhododendron community. Do take time to acquaint yourself with extensions beyond the Cowichan Valley by reading through the District 1 President's Meeting Report, and the Greig Rhododendron Species Advisory Committee Report. And, if you have been hesitating, there is still time to make that spontaneous decision to attend the ARS Conference in Florence, Oregon in a few weeks.

Look at the information that our guest speaker, Margot Moser, sent us to accompany her presentation. There are photos of ferns that she will discuss and a chart that aids in planting these ferns.

Two articles are intended to encourage members to propagate rhododendrons. Norm Todd's article is enhanced by photos of the rhododendrons he mentions, to increase familiarity with plants and to help readers understand why some rhododendrons they may find attractive can be difficult to find.

There are many ways to become involved in your Rhododendron club. Participate in the ROY Award selection process by sending the names of your favourite rhododendrons to Sandra Stevenson or Verna Buhler. Attend the GLAD Meeting set up by your new Executive Team to help it design a program that you would like to experience this season. Send photos and articles to the newsletter editor to have your ideas and photos published for others to enjoy.

I look forward to meeting you at our new location – The Hub – on Wednesday.

Verna

RHODODENDRONS OF THE YEAR 2024 AWARDS (ROY Awards)

Participate in selecting four outstanding rhododendrons for your region!

Rhododendron of the Year Award Regions

- Great Lakes
- Mid-Atlantic
- North East
- North West
- South Central
- South East
- South West
- Southern California/Hawaii



Every year, a Plant Award Committee in each region, identifies one outstanding plant for each of these four categories:

- Elepidote
- Lepidote
- Evergreen Azalea
- Deciduous Azaleas



ROY Award plants must have:

- *Excellent foliage and flowers*
- *An attractive plant habit*
- *A strong resistance to pests and diseases*
- *Cold hardiness for the region*
- *Not been selected for the region, in the past*

Send your ideas to your Chapter's Plant Award Committee, Sandra Stevenson or Verna Buhler, who will forward them to the Region's Plant Award Committee!

Visit the **American Rhododendron Society Website** to view the lists of previous award-winning plants:

<https://www.rhododendron.org/>



ARS District 1 Presidents' Meeting

August 22, 2023,
at Milner Gardens, Qualicum Beach

Report submitted by Dorothy Kennedy and Mary Pike

The biannual Presidents' meeting for District 1 was held this month at the Milner Gardens and attended by our vice-president, Dorothy Kennedy, representing our president, Barrie Agar, who was unavoidably absent in the Shuswap. Secretary Mary Pike accompanied her. They joined representatives from the other chapters on Vancouver Island. Unfortunately, no one from the Vancouver area was able to be present.

Glen Jamieson, chair of the District 1 chapters, conducted the meeting. Apart from the usual necessary approval of minutes, financial reports, etc., reminders of the 2023 Fall ARS Conference in Florence and the Spring ARS Convention in Bellingham (see our newsletter), some points of particular interest to convey to the CVRS members are discussed below.

The incoming president of the American Rhododendron Society, Linda Derkach, spoke about her desire to get to know members better and learn about their joys and challenges. It was interesting to hear her talk about the need for chapters to explore the same challenges our CVRS executive is discussing -- listening to members, looking ahead, organizing events, attracting new members and, more generally, determining the future direction of rhododendron clubs.

Membership dues are to remain the same. Nevertheless, the discussion focused on categories of members, including "friends" whose membership does not contribute to ARS coffers and couples with one membership in common. Linda Derkach reminded the representatives of a June cut-off date for tallying membership, providing a 1.5-year benefit to new members in their association with the ARS.

Zoom: The ability to connect via Zoom has changed how the world disseminates information, and the representatives agreed that District 1 would continue subscribing to this service. Glen particularly noted the advantages of Zoom in accessing international speakers and, we might add, allowing our meetings and speakers to proceed during inclement weather.

Speakers: It was suggested that we consider linking with another nearby chapter to organize speakers, possibly on back-to-back evenings, and thus share the program's cost. Zoom is a feasible alternative, but there is merit in meeting in person and developing a sense of community. Glen Jamieson would like to visit our chapter to give another talk or get to know more of our members. Those responsible for engaging speakers in each chapter are encouraged to coordinate with each other and set up an email link. (Our chapter has a Speakers Engagement Committee consisting of Sandra Stevenson, Janice Moseley, and Tricia Guiguet.)

Conferences and conventions: We must accept that the time involved and the cost of travel to large conferences presents a difficulty to many. It may be time to consider smaller meetings closer to home, where more people can attend. One of the representatives noted that a particular chapter raised considerable funds by hosting such a mini conference. Glen stressed how we must all start thinking about what we want to happen in 2025, for planning is essential.

We heard about the propagation methods in other chapters, aware that we must address that issue in our own society.

Milner Garden: Geoff Ball stopped by briefly and reported on the exciting and challenging work undertaken at the Garden.

We were also encouraged to engage the public through each group's website and Facebook page, local newsletters, plant sales, and partnering with master gardeners, local garden clubs, and other ARS and District chapters. But most importantly, representatives agreed that it is our task to develop programs to engage our members, whether by offering garden tours, hosting mini conferences, attracting fabulous speakers, or acting upon the excellent suggestions we receive from our members.

The meeting ended soon after 2 p.m.



Representatives from North Island Rhododendron Society, Mt. Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society, Nanaimo Rhododendron Society, Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society, and Victoria Rhododendron Society attended the District 1 Presidents' Meeting. Vancouver Rhododendron Society and Fraser South Rhododendron Society representatives were unable to attend. Dorothy Kennedy, Vice President, attended on behalf of CVRS President Barrie Agar. Photo: Verna Buhler

‘GLAD’ meeting

Gather, Listen, and Discuss

Saturday, October 14, 2023, 10am
St. John’s Church in Duncan

*“Your executive has been discussing the best way to enable our society to become more effective in promoting the genus *Rhododendron* in a way that is significant both to those of us who are dedicated experts in the propagation of the species and those of us who are novices interested in learning more.*

We feel there is a need to discuss our concerns and ideas collectively and therefore we have organized a meeting we are calling GLAD, i.e., “Gather, Listen, and Discuss.” This is an important first step in moving forward to at a perplexing time from various points of view – climatic, demographic, membership numbers, roles, and responsibilities and, importantly, determining a future vision for the CVRS.

For this reason, the CVRS Executive has obtained, without charge, the services of a local consultant and expert facilitator, Mr. Doug Thornton, to assist in discussing ideas at a Special Meeting for our entire membership.

. . . [Please review a document you already received via email, which relates the process which led the executive to engaging him. – Editor’s comment]

*This meeting will shape the future of our society. It is essential that every member have a say and listen to the views of others. We hope you will **all** make an effort to come, so please mark the date and time on your calendar. The objective of the meeting will be to gather ideas and decide on a vision for the of the CVRS. Specifics, such as budget allocation, for instance, will be brought to a Special General Meeting.*

For efficient planning and ensuring plenty of refreshments, I would appreciate if you could RSVP to me before Sunday, 24th September, to confirm your attendance.”

Mary Pike
Secretary, CVRS
Email: tyrrell.me@gmail.com

JANICE McLEAN AND RICHARD KERR’S AUGUST GARDEN

*As you know, Richard and I try to have *Rhododendrons* blooming all year round. However, August and September are the problem. But not this year. R. ‘Lees Scarlet’, which is pink, is a VE (Very Early) bloomer, and some years starts blooming near the end of October. However, we were stunned to see one of our groupings blooming in August this year. Because of the drought and heat, the flowers are “pretty wimpy”, but there are about 10 trusses out. I took the photo on August 23rd.*

~ Janice



Why Do Some Bees Dig?

By Genevieve Pugesek
September 21, 2023

This article is drawn from the Xerces Society website: <https://www.xerces.org>

The non-profit organization invites members to share their information and to donate to the society.

"The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation is an international nonprofit organization that protects the natural world through the conservation of invertebrates and their habitats. Our name (which is pronounced Zer-sees, or /'zæ.siz/) comes from the now-extinct Xerces blue butterfly (Glaucopsyche xerces), the first butterfly known to go extinct in North America as a result of human activities. The Xerces blue's habitat was destroyed by development in the sand dunes of San Francisco, and the species was declared extinct by the 1940s."

You may think of bees as born flyers, not diggers. However, many species of bees spend a good chunk of their lives underground. To navigate a subterranean world, these bees have evolved to be talented excavators.

There are a few different reasons a bee might need to dig; if you spot a bee digging in the soil, take a moment to watch to see what it's up to!

Nest Building

Many species of solitary bees, including sweat bees, cellophane bees, digger bees, and miner bees, nest in the ground. Each female constructs her own nest site by digging a tunnel in the soil.

Some bees create shallow burrows less than 4 inches under the soil. Other bees dig tunnels several feet under the ground. In Utah, the Hayne's mining bee (*Andrena Haynes*) has been observed nesting 9 feet under the ground. That's a lot of digging!

Most bees (like the aster mining bee, pictured below) prefer dry, well drained soils to nest in. You might spot ground-nesting bees in your garden, along roadside banks, or in particularly sandy areas.



This aster mining bee (*Andrena asteris*) is excavating a nest site in dry, well drained sand. (Photo: Nick Dorian)

Getting Ready for Winter

As the weather starts to get cooler, you might observe large bumble bees crawling on the ground or digging in the soil. These are queen bumble bees, looking for a place to spend the winter.

Unlike solitary bees, which rear their young on their own, bumble bees live in small colonies with many workers and a single queen. Most of the bees in the colony do not survive the winter; only the new queens, born in the fall or late summer, will live till the next year.

Though bumble bees are social insects, bumblebee queens over winter by themselves. Once the queen has found a good spot with loose dry soil, she will dig a shallow den. She will spend the next 3 to 9 months hibernating, emerging from the soil only once the weather has warmed up.

There's a lot we still don't understand about the habitat needs of overwintering bumblebees. If you happen to spot a bee digging or searching for a place to over winter, please submit your observation to [Queen Quest](#), an effort by Xerces and other collaborators to collect anecdotal observations of overwintering queens.

Parasites

Though digging is a normal behaviour for healthy bees, it can also mean that a bee is very, very sick.

Infections by parasitic nematodes can cause bumblebee queens to spend a lot of time digging. Nematodes generally infect queens in the winter, during hibernation. When an infected queen emerges from her overwintering site, she will spend the remainder of her life, clumsily digging shallow burrows in the soil, spreading immature nematodes through her feces. These parasites can be a big problem for bumble bee populations: in some regions more than a quarter of spring bumble bee queens may be infected by nematodes.

Canopid flies are another parasite of bumble bees which can cause unusual digging behaviours. Canopid flies attack worker bees and drones as they forage on flowers. If successful, the fly will lay an egg between the body segments of a bee. Once the egg hatches, it will start to feed on the bee's insides, eventually inducing the bee to bury itself alive in the soil.

RIP worker bee.



Rhododendron diaprepes

R. diaprepes has big flowers, big buds, big leaves and is several metres high. Overall, the foliage is clean and healthy. This is a collector's rhododendron. The chances of finding it offered for sale these days are limited. It is a good reason to learn how to do your own propagation if you want the unexpected delight and fragrance of such a late flowering cultivar in your own garden.

Rhododendron Crosses from Planning to Flowering

by Lloyd Gilmour

Lloyd Gilmour of Victoria shares his experience of hybridizing and of propagating from seeds.

Lloyd has made some interesting observations.

The article has been lightly edited for clarity by Verna Buhler



Mainly 54-month-old, first bloom seedlings, with a few 66-month-old second bloom seedlings

Seeing results when working from seed requires patience:

In all my time hybridizing, I had only one rhododendron seedling bloom in 30 months from seed.

The species *R. yeufengense* is a precocious pale pink flowering species with rounded leaves that has a low growth rate. One seedling out of five from the ARS seed exchange bloomed at 3.5 years after sowing; the rest bloomed this following Spring. It holds exciting possibilities for small different plants as a parent.

Rhododendron species can take up to 20 years to bloom, whereas most hybrids take four or five years to bloom. They also bloom faster in pots than in the ground.

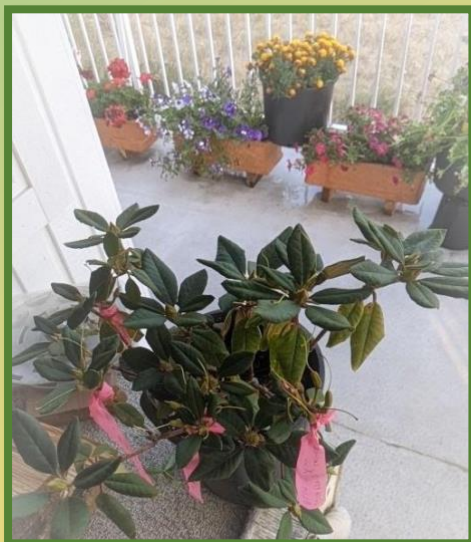
The second-year flower is a better qualifier of the plant's potential. Growth habit, leaf structure, cultural stresses, root strength, ease of propagation and size are all important traits. A hybridizer must remember that most gardeners are not connoisseurs, so the plant must be a good "doer"; we do not want to turn off the average gardener.

Research is very important:

In this work, potential crosses are researched back three generations in the search for dominant traits. Seedlings may lean genetically more towards one parent than the other. Community pots [group planting in seed pots from the same seed collection] may show seedlings with different growth rates, leaf structure, and habit. Some of the "unseen traits" are plant hardiness, fertilizer tolerance, and sun and drought tolerance. I have become somewhat indifferent to some plants dying. Survival of the fittest is a natural process; nature will weed out the unfit over the seasons.

Record keeping in seed collection is essential:

For a hybridizer, labeling is most important; I begin with recording the cross in a book and marking the cross on the parent plant. I use flagging tape with the cross recorded twice using a wide sharpie, then tying it on the base of the parent truss. Each marked truss has only one type of



A dwarf red with various pollen, carefully labelled.

pollen covering all the truss's sticky stigmas. All petals and anthers on the truss are removed to reduce unwanted pollen transfer.

Plants that are pollinated are given extra fertilizer and water during the summer. Seeds should swell through summer and, in the fall, go from light green to yellow. At this point, weekly checking should occur. When the truss seedhead turns medium brown, the seedhead plus flagging tape should be picked and stored in a paper bag or glass until the seed capsule starts to split. Gentle use of pliers and a small flour sifter helps separate seeds from the chaff. Store the seeds in an open tall glass to prevent mold, with a label included. Use an HB pencil. I write the cross top and bottom of the label in case the label breaks. Very special plants get an extra yellow label. I generally start sowing rhododendron seed about late December or early January.

As an alternative to crossing and collecting your own seed, you could order from the ARS Seed Exchange starting in mid-January. *See the website for details.*

Sowing the seeds:

I use 3-inch pots or 6-inch azalea pots for germination depending on seed quantity and size. On the bottom of the pots, I place maple leaves or a paper towel to prevent soil loss through the holes. On this, I place a coarse mixture filling half the pot; then I add a finer (no perlite) mix to just about the inner rim. I sterilize this mix with a very weak boiling mix of 20-20-20. A separate container of peat moss is also sterilized and a thin layer of about 3mm is placed on top and allowed to cool. Two labels are placed in each pot before the seed is sown and checked against the flagging tape. Excess seed is stored in the fridge in labelled pill vials with the cross and date.



((('Jeda' x *R. sanguineum* ssp *haemaleum*) x 'Carmen') and ('Many Moons' x *R. macabranum*) on the right

Rhododendron seed is sown on top of the peat layer as it needs light to germinate as well as moisture and heat of about 23°C. provided by the fluorescents in my 8 ft by 12-foot insulated shed. Squares of saran wrap cover the top of the pot held in place by large elastic bands bought at Staples. The saran wrap is removed when the first true leaves are evident.

Pots are placed in seedling trays with the soil surface about 8 inches below the 32 or 40-watt cool white fluorescents. They are on 14-16 hours per day, controlled by a battery backed up timer from Canadian Tire. (Be sure that the timer can control the inductive wattage of your fluorescents plugged into it)

Watering if needed, should be done by putting water in the bottom of the seedling tray. Germination can start in about ten days with a majority germinating by three weeks; some stragglers take up to 3 months. Germination rates vary greatly with the cross and even vary if the same cross is made a few years later. It seems some parents must mature.

My method may seem complex. I grow a lot of seedlings, but if you can meet the light, temperature, and moisture requirements you have a chance. Alternatively, I could possibly supply established community pots with about 20-30 seedlings for club members to divide up and grow on. This would have a greater chance of success in comparison to somebody trying seedlings for the first time.

Your main threat to small seedlings is Fungus Gnats, I know from experience. Fungus Gnats are attracted to peat moss. I have tried Sticky Traps to spider webs to sundews -- and you thought damping of was an issue!

The plants are Dicots, and the first true leaves appear about three weeks after germination.

At this point the plants have a fighting chance against fungus gnats. If germination is very good, I separate any seedlings with different radicle* colors, and they are planted in a separate pot with the right label. Sometimes excess seedlings are thrown away as I have other crosses that I want to sow. I cannot grow everything. Sometimes good-looking seed does not germinate, or it germinates and then dies; this has everything to do with plant physiology and not culture.

All my seedlings are planted, permanently, outside about 4 months after seeding. Seedlings are not shaded from the sun. I try to plant after the last frost and during a period of cloudy, rainy weather. All plants are in community pots using six-inch azalea pots. The potting mix should be relatively well drained. Courser mix is placed on the pot base, with finer mix towards the top. The mix includes sand, perlite, organic matter, peat moss and a touch of dolomite. It is important that it drains well. Weak solutions of 20-20-20 and fish fertilizer are fed throughout the growing season, ending in August on all pot sizes. On small seedlings, I use a wand to not disturb the surface soil mixture with 20-20-20 or a small can of weak fish fertilizer poured gently onto the soil surface. As the root systems are very small initially, the soil surface must be kept constantly moist; as the plants grow larger, this can be relaxed.

I try to repot in early Spring before shoot growth starts. Generally, I have 2 or 3 pots with the same labels, and I repot seedlings according to size. All transplanted seedlings, regardless of size, must be heathy. My aim is to have leaves just touch each other after the coming summer growth to maximize winter photosynthesis and reduce weeds. My community pots have between 2 to 20 plants per pot dependent on the cross and age of the seedlings. After this they go into separate one-gallon pots. At times, I plant 2 plants per pot using a fairly course mix. From seed germination to flowering stage will require about 4 or 5 Spring "repottings". Seedlings languish if potted in too big a pot.

**Botany: the part of a plant embryo that develops into the primary root.*



21-month-old seedlings;
various crosses

I started growing seedlings in kids' play pools a few years ago as it saves water. Even larger one-gallon pots with about one inch of water seem to result in benefits for seedlings during the summer heat. Later, in the cooler Fall, I place the plants on the ground.

Culling occurs throughout the year; bad leaves, poor health, or simply me being underwhelmed by the plant makes it a good compost candidate.

Then, there is also that plant that is "OK" in my eyes, but somebody else really likes it, so I give it to them. If you get seedlings or seeds from me, it is more important to me that you try to grow them, than never try. Even if you fail the first time, I usually have more seeds.

Sometimes, a *creator* hits the jackpot, and this wonderful plant drives him onward!



21-month community pots in front, and 1-gallon 33-month pots behind

"Do you have a bucket list? Are you curious? Try it!"

~ Lloyd Gilmour

The World Would Be a Better Place. . .

This article is reprinted from Norman Todd's, The Complete Wit and Wisdom of Norman Todd, a publication of the Victoria Rhododendron Society in 2011.

We read and hear a lot these days about genetic engineering. We are promised an end to hunger with an abundance of food. We are tempted to hope for life by reading that the world's best minds have created the technology to grow replacement organs from embryonic stem cells. The ethical problems raised by these scientific advances are far beyond my understanding but the promise of a longer life, I admit, has some attractions. When I first became interested in rhododendrons one of my mentors saw Albert de Mezey. As we strolled through his famous garden on Foul Bay Road, he advised me in his richly resonant Hungarian baritone that to grow rhododendrons you needed two things – a physical age of thirty and longevity of three hundred years.

I am musing on these matters as I am sticking cuttings in my propagator. Today I put in five cuttings of *R. diaprepes* 'Garantua'. I know that should I be lucky enough to get these cuttings to develop roots, and I am then lucky enough to get the roots to support some top growth and make a new plant, it will probably be 2020 at the earliest before there is hope of that plant bearing a blossom. I also know that even as I am absorbed in this stone age style of attempting to create another living entity, the new bio-technologies will not be available soon enough for me to see that flower on this particular *diaprepes*. Quite quickly, I reason with an amazing appeasement of my initial unease, that the world will most probably be a better place with one more *diaprepes* in it, and I should quit making any connection between the life of that cutting and my own.

I think, therefore, the world would be a better place if we all got at least one cutting to root and made a new plant and to heck with a three-hundred-year life span for humans. Just be glad that rhododendrons have it. And so, with this primitive process that I use, I become a creator, and I can look forward to the hugely fulfilling feeling I will have when I gently tamp those rooted cuttings into a six-inch pot and tie a brand new label on each fledgling plant.

In the past I have had groups of people come to my not very sanitary greenhouse and the group sits on a plank on one side of the propagating bench while I do a demonstration of how to make a new plant. I have a supply of Styrofoam coffee cups and a pail of moistened peat and perlite, a small container of rooting hormone and some clear plastic bags. These groups are often what I call the 'blue rinse' set – middle-aged ladies who have immaculate gardens as well as immaculate hairdos. (*Middle age in these genetically enhanced times goes from 55 to 85*). Then they all prepare their own cuttings: removing all but three or four leaves and cutting those leaves in half; wounding the base of the cutting just through to the cambium layer under the bark; dipping the cutting in the rooting compound, then dibbling a hole in the 'dirt' filled coffee cup and popping in the cutting. After labelling and making a little greenhouse with the plastic bag sealed by a rubber band

they take off for home, trooping out of the greenhouse in single file with smugly satisfied smirks on their faces and the precious plastic bag held delicately between thumb and forefinger, each of them looking as if she was reliving the taking home from kindergarten of that first finger painting to show to an admiring parent. For me, the most satisfying part comes when we these people come back and say, "Do you remember when we took those cuttings of that azalea? Well, I put it on the kitchen windowsill and now it has grown three inches. Should I plant it outside?"

[If you would like to know some more about making new rhododendrons and have not attended a workshop about making new rhododendrons, visit the October 2022 newsletter issue found on the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Website - Newsletter Page to read an article about propagation]



If you do participate [in a workshop], you will quickly become aware that certain varieties – 'Lem's Cameo', for example – are notoriously difficult to root. You will also be amazed at the success that you will have with your first efforts. Neophytes have a high success rate. I attribute this to beginners' cleanliness and the extra care taken but there is no doubt beginners have chlorophyll in their fingertips. When I first took cuttings



The three photos above, of *Rhododendron* 'Lem's Cameo', drawn from the Oregon State University website on Landscape Plants, illustrates why it can be frustrating to a propagator to find that such a lovely rhododendron is difficult to propagate. The "*world would be a better place*" with successful rooting and planting of another 'Lem's Cameo' in a garden.

. . . of 'Lem's Cameo' twenty years ago, I put in ten cuttings, and I got ten plants. Every year since then I have put in ten cuttings of 'Lem's Cameo' and just occasionally get one with roots.



The latest 'must have' species is *R. pachysanthum*. It is very hard to root. Some of the 'Propagators' find *R. pachysanthum* easy. It is the same with *R. tariense*.



However, just to make sure you are not an exception to this 'novice-no-problem', or 'tyro's triumph' phenomenon, take a few cuttings of an evergreen azalea or *R. 'Elizabeth'*. Now there are those who would say that the world would not necessarily be a better place with another 'Elizabeth'. However, she is a turn-on, as she is so easily propagated. That initial success is crucial to your continued career as a plant creator.



New plants can also be created from seed. Seed may be obtained from our [Victoria] society, and also from the Seed Exchange of the American Rhododendron Society. You can also be really creative and do some hands-on genetic engineering and make your own hybrid, taking pollen from the anthers of one flower and putting it on the pistil of another. There is a faction, to which I belong, that thinks that there are too many registered hybrids, and that the world would be a better and certainly simpler place if more restraint were exercised in registering new names. That does not imply that there should be fewer new plants but only that those enshrined in the Rhododendron Registry be distinctive enough in habit or blossom or hardiness or some other characteristic, to merit inclusion. I once counted 32 registered plants, with *R. yakushimanum* and 'Mars' as parents. No one grows or knows them all, but it is doubtful that more than a few are worth having a special moniker. That having been said, I sure would like one named for my granddaughter – and another grandchild on the way – so you can see that when we do our little bit of rhododendron procreation and want the world to know about it, we should take some pains to make sure we are, in fact, making our world a better place.

Compared to plants like soybean, cotton, or wheat, the level of effort going into genetically engineering new varieties of rhododendrons is minute. Some of the latest offerings from some

of the big nurseries are genetically engineered. They have had a number of chromosomes in their cells augmented. It is claimed that these plants are thicker, tougher, with thicker foliage, longer lasting flowers and are good 'doers'. This induced polyploidy can now be achieved by the amateur by using a colchicine-like chemical on seedlings. Such increase in chromosomal numbers is very low-tech compared to adding new material to genes – which is the cause of so much concern and debate with GM foodstuffs. Still, isn't it tempting to think of adding genes from a plant that blooms all the time – *impatiens* for example – to our rhododendrons so that we get a longer period of bloom? And I think it would be nice to put in a gene or two to make rhododendrons unwelcoming to powdery mildew. However, it is at this point that our cautionary alarms should go off. If there are no root weevils are there subsequently no strawberries?



Once afflicted by the compulsion to create new rhododendrons, the pressure can lure you into questionable practices. I am told that when a truss of 'Point Defiance' was first displayed at a show, a pollen thief swiped every grain. There was an outcry. I also recall being with a group on a garden tour and among the group was a well-known hybridizer. Going round the garden I was astonished to see this hybridizer, in a manner that certainly looked subversive, snap a truss from a bush of 'Phyllis Korn'. I was embarrassed for him when our eyes met. He really did look guilty as sin, but obviously he wanted that pollen. Later when the subject of polyploidy was being discussed, 'Phyllis Korn' was singled out as being a naturally occurring polyploid, having come from open pollinated 'Gomer Waterer' seed. The discussor bemoaned the fact that 'Phyllis Korn' was totally sterile.

The famous hybridizer's face fell to the floor. He has, however, produced so many good plants that I am sure in the final reckoning he has made the world a better place and his lapse in etiquette has been forgiven. Had he asked politely for a cutting, he would not have been refused.

We are told that biochemistry and cell biology will be the technologies of the 21st century. Meanwhile in the last months of the 20th century, [Norm Todd penned this article in October 1999] we can, with very little effort or expertise, improve the ambience of our habitat by making a new plant which has potential, without having any modified genes, to live into the 23rd century. It's an act of faith, of course, but there are rhododendrons in our city [Victoria] that are now well into their second century.

I think you'll agree that they do add a little to making our world a better place.

~ Norm Todd

2023 – 2024
Calendar of Events

Contact CVRS:

cowichanvalleyrhododendron@gmail.com

Wednesday, October 4, 2023, 7 – 9pm

CVRS October Meeting

Speaker: Margot Moser *Small Ferns for Gardens and Rockeries*

Saturday, October 14, 2023, 10am

CVRS 'Glad' Meeting

St. John's Church Hall

Saturday, October 19 - Sunday October 21, 2023

ARS 2023 Fall Western Conference, Florence, Oregon, USA

Wednesday, November 1, 2023

CVRS November Meeting

Speaker: Caroline Josefsson *Gardening with Less Water – Learning from the Garry Oak Ecosystem*

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY EVENTS

October 13 - 15, 2023

Australian Rhododendron Society Conference, Tasmania, Australia

October 19 – 21, 2023

ARS Fall Western Regional Conference, Florence, Oregon

October 24 - 27, 2023

New Zealand Rhododendron Association, Rodenza Taranaki, New Plymouth, New Zealand.

May 2 - 5, 2023

ARS Spring Convention, Bellingham, Washington, USA

USEFUL LINKS

Cowichan Rhododendron Society:

cowichanrhodos.ca/

Victoria Rhododendron Society:

victoriarhodo.ca/index.html

Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society:

marsrhodos.ca/

North Island Rhododendron Society:

nirsrhodos.ca/ws/

The American Rhododendron Society:

rhododendron.org/

Nanaimo Rhododendron Society:

nanaimorhodos.ca

Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden:

rhodygarden.org

Nanoose Garden Club:

nanoosegardenclub.ca/

Linda Gilkeson:

lindaqilkeson.ca/

Vancouver Island Rock and Garden Society:

virags.com

Linda Chalker-Scott:

<https://puyallup.wsu.edu/lcs/>

Steve Henning:

rhodyman.net

Rhododendron, Camellia, Magnolia

<https://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/>

Office of the American Rhododendron Society: member@arsoffice.org



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society
(A Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society)
Duncan, B.C.

Email:

cowichanvalleyrhododendron@gmail.com

2022 - 2023 Executive

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