



Newsletter



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

Volume 28:6 September 2017

President's Message

This has been one of the longest dry spells in memory. Everywhere I look are burnt and yellow lawns, and even the stalwart late summer perennials are hanging their heads and looking ready for a good cutting back. It may still seem like summer, but we are assuredly drifting into the cooler and shorter days of autumn. The rhododendrons will be setting their flower buds now, and the warm dry weather will help them set in greater numbers. Although the dryness may have stressed some plants, wood should be well ripened and more able to withstand any cold snaps we get this winter.



Milner Gardens and Woodland

**September Special Guest
Speaker: Geoff Ball**

Wed, Sept 6 @ 7:30pm

**Milner Gardens and
Woodland**

(More details on page 2)

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There are a few changes to our board. Many thanks to Siggie Kemmler and Peter Lewis, who have given freely of their time, knowledge, and gardens for several years, and have stepped down this year. Ali Morris and Diane Allen quickly stepped into the breach, and we look forward to their contributions. David Annis has kindly agreed to be the new membership chair and brings years of experience in the club.

Our speaker this month is Geoff Ball, Director of Milner Gardens. He will bring us up to date on the work in the garden and especially the new Rhododendron Species Garden, which is currently being planted.

As a result of Peter stepping down we are now looking for some people to form a **“Speaker Committee”** to find speakers for the club. This would be an excellent opportunity, if you are a new member, to meet other people, and a good way of finding out more about the horticultural community on the Island. Anyone interested in this would receive plenty of assistance with suggestions for finding speakers. We are also looking for a small team to head up the Garden Tour Schedule for this season. This would entail setting up Member Garden Tours in spring and several small multi-van tours to gardens of interest on the Island, or perhaps further afield, depending on interest. For more information, contact me, or another member of the executive.

Barrie Agar, President

September's Special Guest Speaker

GEOFF BALL, Executive Director of Milner Gardens and Woodland

Wed, Sept 6 @ 7:30

Geoff Ball earned his horticultural training in the program at VIU, and has been associated with Milner Gardens for 18 years. He is now Executive Director, and has guided the Garden, and surrounding Woodland, through many changes and improvements over the years without ever losing sight of the original vision. Geoff will give us a deeper understanding about growing Rhododendrons on Vancouver Island and, perhaps, about the trends of the future as well.

Milner Gardens and Woodland is home to 10 acres of lush gardens, which in turn are surrounded by an

old-growth forest seven times that size. It is garden-lovers paradise; this 70-acre seaside garden is filled with trails and gardens featuring the colourful bounty of the seasons. The property is perched on the edge of a bluff that looks out to the expansive Strait of Georgia.

An impressive collection of rhododendrons can be found along the trails, along with beautiful cyclamen, trilliums and much more. Traditional tea service is offered in the quaint house where the Queen of England once stayed.

Sept 6/2017 Tea Service Leader: Judeen Hendrickson

Letter *from the Editor*



After the winter and spring that challenged our patience with extraordinary wet and cold temperatures, some of us are perhaps admitting to other gardeners that we have had enough of dry and hot. Yes, that cold period was apparently only months ago; the thought is so foreign now that I needed to double check to confirm that those really were the conditions of this past spring. By now, records, in terms of days without precipitation, have been broken. Remember that spectacular night near the beginning of August, which sent some of us outdoors with faces to the skies and arms stretched outwards in praise for the rain? Some of us may even have discarded the light summer dresses we were wearing and danced through raindrops when we stepped out to turn off the taps after dark (only to follow through with those threats we had made should we ever actually feel rain again)

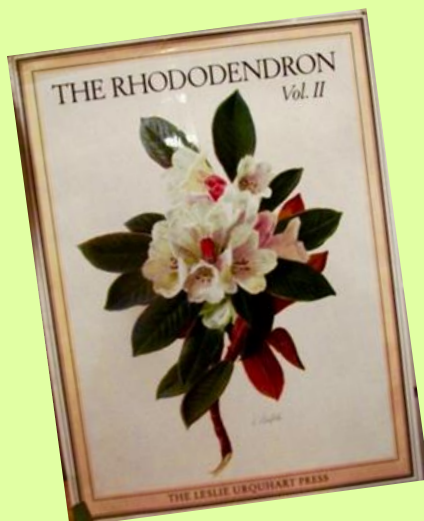
Many of you wisely installed irrigation systems when you planted your gardens; some of us didn't, and this summer has challenged our love of gardening.

Heeding the tips that our Spring Panel of Experts offered after the harsh winter served me well. I left my dead plants in the ground, averting my eyes for months. Then I experienced it: the irrational excitement of a tiny green sprout on a dead stick! And I experienced it more times than I would have expected. Had my husband also averted his eyes instead of "dealing with that dead thing", there might have been even more delightful experiences. Thank you, knowledgeable colleagues, for sharing your experiences.

September's newsletter will offer a few suggestions and simple reminders about strengthening our plants before that currently unimaginable cold returns. Although it does bring relief, we do remind ourselves that the concern about drought and heat stressed rhododendrons is not over when the dew glistens and the days shorten. As a quick reminder of what may be coming, we will look back to when only deep Canadian enthusiasm and camaraderie warmed us during chilly days of June. Perhaps, too, we will be inspired to plan a visit to Milner Gardens after reading about the progress that has been made to the Species Garden.

Begin thinking about the possibilities of a CVRS Book Club. The CVRS books rolled out of their former home on August 26th, and are lining up in the bookshelves in the library in our home. These fabulous books are worth protecting and using!

Verna Buhler



‘Plum Drops’

By Ian Efford

I am interested in the evolution and the related biogeography of plants. Such a perspective allows one to learn how the genetic code of the original species in a group has evolved and diversified into a wide range of different forms and, sometimes, how various animals and other plants have adapted in association with these changes.



Rhododendron benhallii “Plum Drops”

A good example is the parallel evolution of the various pollinators. One need only to look the shape and colour of a flower to make a first guess that its pollinator might be a bird, for example a hummingbird in the Americas, a long-tongued moth, or a bee.

The advent of detailed and inexpensive DNA analysis has greatly expanded our knowledge of the relationships between plants and corrected errors which, to date, had been based on morphological features.

Recent DNA studies of the genus *Menziesia*, an ericaceous plant with one species common on Vancouver Island – *Menziesia ferruginea*, the False Huckleberry – have shown that the plants in this genus should be included in the genus *Rhododendron*. Ken Cox in “*Rhododendron Species 2016*” [available in our library] has reviewed the genus and re-named many of the species. He has re-named the local B.C. plant as *R. menziesii*. Unfortunately, this species is not a very attractive garden plant

but some of the other species in the old genus have attractive varieties.

Not long ago, I obtained one of the plants in this group from our plant raffle. It turned out to be a colourful selection of *Rhododendron benhallii* named ‘Plum Drops’. According to Ken Cox, this plant was selected by Steve Hootman at the R.S.B.G. from seed collected in Japan where the species is native to north Honshu and Hokkaido.

The plant forms a compact bush, which grows slowly and will reach about four feet. Apparently, the group is difficult to root from cuttings and is normally propagated from seed. Mine was in full-bloom this year and an attractive addition to the garden. It contrasts with the other rhododendrons in form, being a tight clumped plant, and in the flower shape. The shape is typical of most of the ericaceous plants we see around us every day – huckleberry, salal, heather, and arbutus, for example.

The fact that this new addition to the genus

Rhododendron has flowers that are very similar to many of the cold climate species that have had a circumpolar distribution for the last 60 million years suggest that the rhododendrons may well have evolved in the cold northern regions. Subsequent migration resulted in them reaching the Himalayan Mountains where they experienced ideal conditions for speciation. The species bloom or “hot spot” that resulted generated most of the species and their hybrids that populate our gardens today.

If anyone is interested in growing this plant, contact me in the autumn when our plant should have seed.

The Rhododendron Species Garden within Milner Gardens and Woodland

Report prepared by John Deniseger and Marilyn Dawson, and forwarded by Alan Campbell

The Rhododendron Species Garden at Milner Gardens and Woodland is now a fact. During late May and early June, a small team of dedicated volunteers from MARS and NRS (Mount Arrowsmith and Nanaimo chapters) planted more than 120 species rhododendrons to launch the project, physically, after many, many meetings and some setbacks over several years.

Each of the five ARS Vancouver Island Chapters (District 1) have created a unique partnership with Milner and Vancouver Island University to build a

rhododendron species garden within MGW. The Species Advisory group which includes representation from each Island chapter has put considerable effort into selecting species appropriate for our climate and specimens of verified provenance to illustrate the tremendous variety and diversity within the genus *Rhododendron*, including unique and rare species that are threatened in the wild.

The 0.75-acre garden highlights six geographic areas representing the origin of the majority of temperate species rhododendrons: North America; Northeast Asia; Sichuan province China; Himalayas; Yunnan province China; and Europe.

On-site activity was limited last summer and fall due to an archaeological assessment of the site after the discovery of a *midden*, but work resumed this spring with conditional approval by the archeology team.



Entry Arbour into the Species Garden



The planting crew



Volunteers began by putting up a temporary deer fence. An entry arbour was designed, built and installed and the pathway through the arbour was completed. Stonework was completed in the area of the entry arbour. Milner volunteers weeded the entire area. Irrigation trenches were dug and an automatic irrigation system was designed and built. Pathways were installed, and truckloads of a special soil mix were brought, in stages, onto the site in preparation for planting.

Just like the proverbial postman working in all conditions, volunteers braved chill and rain to get the tender plants into the ground in four sessions that included erecting shade barriers to protect from wind and hot summer sun. Since the completion of these tasks, a supervision roster was established, and volunteers have been checking

the plants three times a week for sun and wind damage, and ensuring adequate watering. Planting is on hold until the fall. More than 120 species have planted, thus far, in the area initially designed for 250 rhododendrons.

Plans are underway to plant many of the remaining rhododendrons this coming fall, as well as the feature trees and hundreds of companion plants. Other upcoming plans include completion of walkways, replacing the temporary deer fence with permanent fencing, and the installation of benches and interpretative signage.

A grant application has been submitted to assist with the plant accessioning and interpretative signage. The official opening of the species garden is planned for the spring of 2018.



Shade cloth protecting some of the Rhododendrons

Of the \$20,000 donated by Island Chapters to get the Garden started, slightly less than half has been spent. As before, approval to spend more will be requested as needed from the Species Garden Advisory Committee.

Also, thank you to those who helped prepare the letters of support for the grant application for funds for garden signage, being prepared by Geoff Ball and John Deniseeger.



Winter is Coming

Verna Buhler

Is there adequate time, before it arrives, to fully prepare? Perhaps.

Rhododendrons' love-hate relationship with heat:

Moderate summer heat helps ripen rhododendron wood to withstand the winter, and helps bud set for next year's blooms, but excess heat and drought weaken a plant's reserve. How stressed are our plants as they enter the winter season?

Plant growth and flowering improves with sun and light, but direct sunlight on the root-ball produces the hottest soil temperatures. Most rhododendrons cannot tolerate hot roots for an extended period of time. In their natural habitats in mountainous areas, monsoons and cloud cover serve the purpose of balancing the conditions.

Frost and Cold:

It is clearly understood that rhododendrons vary greatly in their hardiness to cold, and that planting the **ironclads**, with -32C ratings, is sensible. But that list is limited, and rhododendron enthusiasts constantly push limits. After all, we know that snow covers most rhododendron species in their native habitats in winter and protects them from cold. In our regions, however, snow and coldest temperatures do not necessarily coincide and



this creates the challenges. Acclimatization is as important as temperature in determining hardiness. Rapid fluctuations in weather are common on the West Coast.

Spring frosts and early autumn frosts are the most damaging. Very few flowers are frost resistant, and buds and new growth are destroyed. Most plants recover from this. If the sap is running in the stem and sudden freezing temperatures occur, the sap freezes and the bark on the stems and branches splits open. Large parts of the plant, or an entire plant, even hardier ones, may be destroyed.

Are the seasonal temperature changes in our area here to stay?

Perhaps not, but the past several summers of extended 30-degree weather, without periods of cloud cover that West Coast dwellers have long taken for granted, and more frequent and enduring snowfalls, suggest that we may have to become more engaged in protecting our rhododendrons from both heat and frost.

- Rhododendrons shade their own and their garden companions' roots well. Knowledgeable close planting helps to create such effective conditions. Knowing the growing habits and requirements of companion plants is essential. Some are too greedy and dense to share the nutrients and moisture with shallow rooted rhododendrons.
- Extra artificial sun protection may be required when a garden is young and plants are highly exposed before they reach mature size. Shade cloth is being used to protect young plants at the Species Garden at Milner Gardens and Woodland.
- Overhead shade provides shelter from both hot sun and a few degrees protection from late frosts. Planting trees to provide the perfect filtered shade canopy requires knowledge of the branching and root structures of trees. Avoid trees with shallow roots that compete with rhododendrons, and trees with brittle branches that frequently break and damage plants beneath them.

***Rhododendron* 'Sarita**
Loder x calophytum X
macabeanum x
basilicum' photo (1984
ARS Seed Distribution
and their serial number
was 1423)



- Microclimate areas do exist in all gardens. It is important to identify these in our yards and plant, or relocate, our rhododendrons accordingly. South and west walls are generally warmer. A sheltered courtyard may be the warmest site in summer, and we may thoughtfully plant our most borderline plants in this area. However, if this area is lower, at the bottom of a slope or hollow, in winter the frost settles and this lovely spot may actually become a pocket of the greatest cold. Poor *Rhododendron edgeworthii*, and *Rhododendron* 'Polar Bear'!

What can we do in September?

Personally, I learned several hard lessons last winter, and I have considerable work to do. In a waterproof-paper booklet, I have prepared lists of the rhododendrons in our yard, categorized in accordance with their hardiness rankings. I'll have to find that booklet, and then, as I go around finally matching my waiting labels to the corresponding plant, I will place a bright stake beside the ones that must be moved from, or into, special microclimates in our yard. Some of these tasks can happen as soon as other pressing chores, such as harvesting and watering, slip down the priority list, and George and I can prepare new areas for planting.

To Do – September 2017:

- Continue watering, strengthening the plants
- Check for heavy soil, and loosen it, or lift the entire plant above the hard pan, mixing in some organic matter
- Move plants to utilize the microclimates in the yard
- Mulch well with bark mulch to insulate the roots
- Plant carefully selected trees to provide some shelter, even if not for the upcoming winter, then at least for next summer
- Gather some artificial protective materials, such as burlap, cute hoop houses perhaps made from old lamp shades, or old wicker baskets, to quickly cover young exposed plants in the event of forecasts of severe weather fluctuations
- Continue learning. Attend the first CVRS Book Club meeting to browse through the vast resources available, and to share experiences over coffee or spirits, and snacks



CVRS SUMMER PICNIC – JUNE 2017

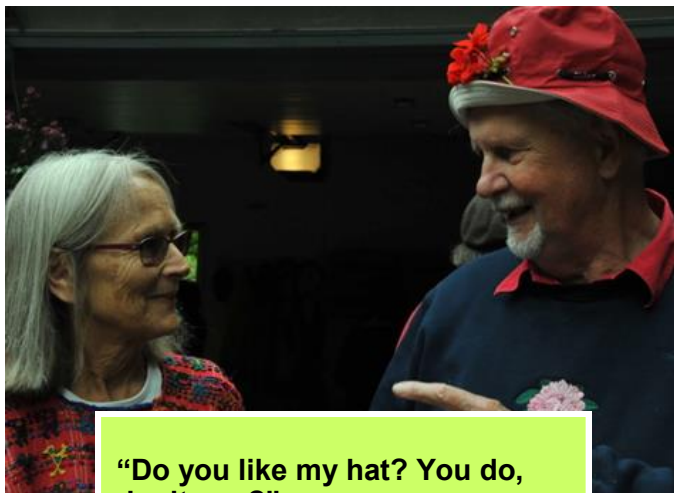
Event captured by our member photographer, Sharon Tillie



**Siggs and Maria
Kemmler, our gracious
hosts of the 2017
Summer Picnic.**

**Thank you so very
much! You delighted us
all by sharing your
immaculate garden as
the perfect setting for
our annual June event.**





"Do you like my hat? You do, don't you?"

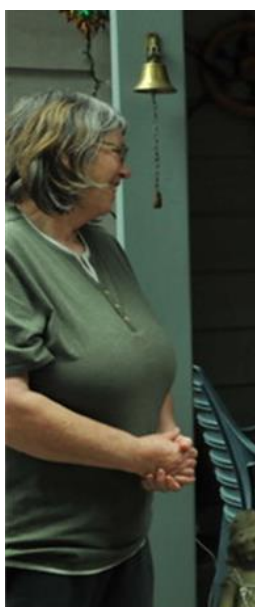




"All of these are going home with someone today?"



"I did it! I am going home with exactly the plant I wanted!"



Measurable indicator of success:

These special people, who had the most difficult tasks, are all still smiling at the end of the event.

IT'S HAPPENING IN MEMBERS' GARDENS

A Summer Bloomer in Carrie Nelson's Garden



The label was faded, but this is possibly *R.* 'Sixpence', or *R.* 'Silver Sixpence' which I purchased from Joe. It should not be blooming now, but it is, and not just one bud. Two buds have opened and two more look like they will open. The plant might be happy to be out of a pot. All my plants from Joe, look good in the ground. Thanks Joe!

Upcoming Events

September 6

CVRS September Meeting

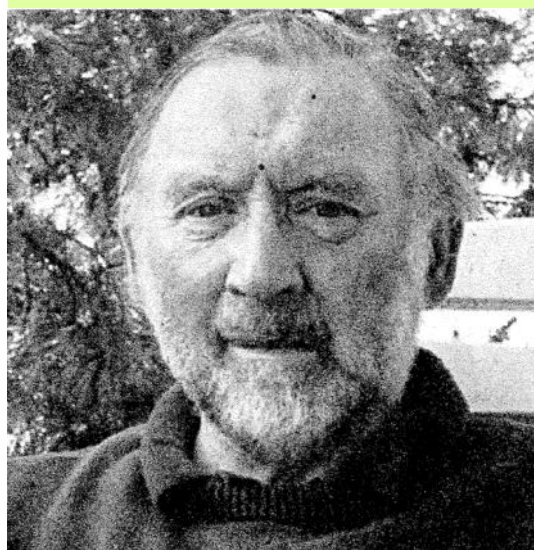
Speaker: Geoff Ball

October 4

CVRS October Meeting

Speaker: Garth Wedemire

Topic: "*Choosing Species Rhododendrons for your Garden*"



MR. RHODODENDRON - NORM TODD

We, Victoria Rhododendron Society members, are sad to announce the recent passing of our beloved Norm Todd, on Friday, July 21, 2017

Norm was well known on Vancouver Island as "Mr. Rhododendron". His love of and knowledge about rhododendrons was boundless. For years, during VRS meetings, Norm was the man who identified and commented on most of the rhododendrons on our raffle table.

Norm was the owner of Firwood Nurseries and was responsible for many members joining our Society. He was a respected member of the American Rhododendron Society and was awarded the Silver Medal for his contribution to the world of rhododendrons.

In 2011, Calvin Parsons and other members of the Victoria Rhododendron Society compiled Norm's articles to publish a book, *The Complete Wit and Wisdom of Norman Todd*. They are so well written and often so humorous, that the book has been very popular.

A service of remembrance will occur at the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific on Saturday, Sept. 23, between 2 and 4pm. No flowers (or trusses) by request.

Lois Blackmore and Theresa McMillan



MOE MASSA - WILL BE DEEPLY MISSED

The rhododendron community lost one of the most respected and well-loved members of the VRS with the passing of Moe Massa on June 21, 2017.

Moe was very energetic and always interested in trying new and different plants. He was generous to a fault and his memory was incredible. If he had a copy of the plant, and someone expressed an interest in that particular plant, the next time a meeting happened, Moe would arrive with that plant in hand.

Last fall, his special interest was big leaved rhododendrons. He was proud of his *R. macabeanum* that he had grown from seed. This spring, even though he was ill, he was busy extending his vegetable garden. His positive attitude, enthusiasm, and love of rhododendrons were an inspiration to so many of us.

Moe was a stalwart of the VRS organization. No matter when, who, or why, he always chatted with friends or with strangers and invited them to view his and Hannah's large and extended rhododendron garden at Bermuda Place near Sooke. To say he loved his garden was an understatement. In past years, he spent many hours expanding his garden, creating a water feature, hand painting rocks with the plants' names and carefully placing them underneath for readability by visitors.

Moe was a sentimentalist at heart. Many of his unregistered plants were named after special friends and often they had a unique connection to the hybridizer who created them. He will be missed and always remembered as a influential force in the VRS Chapter.

Lois Blackmore with additional details by Heather Dickman



NANCY THOMSON - A WONDERFUL LADY

The passing of a longtime member of Victoria Rhododendron Society, Nancy Thomson, on July 19, 2017 saddens our community. Nancy was a wonderful gardener; she was a rhododendron enthusiast and expert. Her gardens were lovingly and artfully created. Her knowledge about the genus rhododendron was well rounded.

Nancy attended the first overseas ARS Convention in Oban, Scotland in 1996, and was often seen escorting Margaret Buffam on the garden tours and boat excursions. In 2005, Nancy was an active member of the group that put together the "goody" stuffed ARS Convention bags.

Her memory and love of rhododendrons will always be cherished. Nancy will be remembered for her gracious and loving manner in all aspects of life.

Lois Blackmore

CVRS 2017 - 2018 TEA SERVICE SCHEDULE

DATE	TEAM LEADER	MEMBERSHIP LIST (updated July 13, 2017)	
Sept 6/2017	Judeen Hendrickson	20 - 37	Efford - Kerr
Oct 4	David Annis	1 - 19	Abbott - Dumont
Nov 1	Elaine Kitchen	38 - 56	Kitchen - Pike
Dec 3	Christmas Party	McLay House/5241 Koksilah Rd. (to be confirmed)	
Jan/2018	No Meeting		
Feb. 7	Joyce Rodgers	57 - 75	Porter - Zoffman
March 7	David Annis		
April 4	Judeen Hendrickson		
May 2	Elaine Kitchen		
June	Picnic		

Note:

- There should always be AT LEAST THREE people assigned to tea service. They need to be there at 7:00 p.m.
- Team leaders are responsible to bring or appoint someone to bring 1/2 liter homo milk; notify team members to supply goodies; organize set-up, making tea and coffee, and the kitchen clean-up after meetings. If items require replacement (tea, napkins, sugar, etc.) please notify team leader for the following month.
- If team leader is unable to attend the scheduled meeting, it is his/her responsibility to contact another team member to fill in for his/her absence.
- There are typed sheets (CVRS Tea Service, CVRS Kitchen Clean-up, Dishwasher Instructions) in CVRS Blue Box, which Roy Elvins brings up to the kitchen from storage
- No member over 80 is expected to work nor bring items. Please, relax and enjoy!



2017-18 Executive

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

Vice President: Judeen Hendricksen

Past President: Carrie Nelson

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

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

Membership Chair: David Annis

Directors at Large:
Diane Allen, Alan Campbell, Ron Martin, Ali Morris

Convenors

Sunshine: Mary Gale

Tea: Judeen Hendricksen

Raffle: Hilda Gerrits

Club Liaison: Alan Campbell

Library: TBA (due to change of Library venue)

Membership Recruitment: Peter Lewis

Program Co-ordinator: Vacant

History: Ian Efford

Garden/Bus Tours: Vacant

CV Garden Fair: The Team

Facility Liaison: Roy Elvins

Christmas Party: The Team



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

A Chapter of the American
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April 2018

<http://cowichanvalleygardenfair.com>



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