



NEWSLETTER

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Editor: Ian E. Efford

November 2008

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Wow, weren't the leaves stunning this past month! Lots of yellows and reds this year, the best display that I can remember for some time. It was even spectacular in the southern part of the Fraser Canyon and in the Fraser Valley when we drove through after a quick trip to Prince George.

Christmas is just around the corner. You have seen some of the items sneaking into the stores over the last little while. Once Halloween is over with, we will see a big change. That brings me to the CVRS Christmas event. This year the Executive decided that the December meeting would be changed in format slightly. We won't be having our big turkey and ham dinner extravaganza but a more intimate appetizer and dessert "finger food" event. More information will be given at the November meeting.

There are still some positions that are vacant. We desperately need a coordinator for the Spring Sale. The sale is our major fundraiser for the year and is important to the club. There are also openings for Social, Garden Tours, Website, Secretary at the

General Meetings, and one Member at Large.

Please consider filling one of these tasks. Some of them don't require very much effort. Thank you in advance.

Memberships are due now. Sandra Stevenson wishes to get the data and the bank draft ready to send in to the ARS during November. Sending it in one lot, instead of several, simplifies her job tremendously.

I hope to see you at the meeting on the 5th. Ian Efford's presentation on Edinburgh should be quite a contrast to the Phytophthora talk some of us went to in October!

David Annis

From the Editor

A rather shorter newsletter this month as I have not received too much new material. If you have something to say related to rhododendrons, send me the article. On the other hand, if you know someone with an interesting view, ask them to write an article.

This edition contains the second in the series of articles about gardens on the island that

The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

A Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society

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one should visit during the year. More are coming.

Any input will be welcome, send it to me at efford@shaw.ca or at 250-597-4470. This number is new and might not work for a few more days.

Ian E. Efford

WHAT'S COMING UP?

5th November 7.30pm

Ian E. Efford will speak on the International Rhododendron Conference in Edinburgh with emphasis on the gardens visited and their significance in the history of rhododendron exploration.

3rd December 6.30pm

Christmas Party - book the time in your calendar!

MISTING FOR SEEDLINGS AND CUTTINGS

Ian E. Efford

For anyone interested in acquiring a large number of new rhododendrons, the choice is simple: buy them or grow them yourself. Obviously, one is much less expensive than the other. For do-it-yourselfers, seeds give you access to a wide range of species that may not be common around the Valley, but the time from planting to flowering can be

more than five years. Cuttings, on the other hand, allows one to take pieces of any rhododendron that one likes that one can access legally! Recently, Alan Campbell described the process of taking and planting the cuttings. That is only the first step. One has to keep the cuttings for a few months to allow rooting and, during this period, the critical issue is keeping their leaves moist.

In our climate, keeping the cuttings misted during the winter months can be achieved by putting them outside in a protected spot so that they benefit from the winter rains. This approach is inexpensive and is used by some of our members. It does mean, however, that the root area cannot be heated, which is a significant encouragement for rooting.

If the plants are to be warm, then the simplest approach is to plant them in pots and bring them into the house where they can sit on the windowsill. To maintain the moisture, a plastic bag tied over the pot with wire arches inside to keep the plastic from touching the leaves is again a very inexpensive approach.

The alternatives to these two approaches are more expensive but far more successful in producing rooted cuttings. These approaches can be divided into three: a hand misting system, and automated misting system and a fogger.

Misting with a hand held spray bottle or a fine spray hose is by far the less expensive approach but it does require regular attendance and a conscientious assistant if one goes away. Hand spraying does have the advantage that the leaves of both seedlings and cuttings can be sprayed with a very dilute

fertilizer every few weeks. I have used hand spraying with some good results but find regular attention to the matter difficult to maintain. This was particularly a problem with my earlier design of a cutting bed. It was heated from below but the plastic cover was not tightly sealed. The result was a loss of some of the cutting from drying out when I missed a day or two of spraying.

Anne and Roger Slaby have an automated sprinkler system in their greenhouse that is directly connected to the water supply. It works by controlling the valve with a metal vane that loses weight as it dries. When dry, it opens the valve and the cuttings are sprayed with a fine mist. When wet, the weight of the vane closes the valve and the water is cut off. A simple, mechanical approach to maintaining a moist atmosphere for the cuttings.

Finally, one comes to automatic foggers. These are more sophisticated than any of the above approaches and can result in rapid, 100% rooting of cuttings. A recent article in the Australian Rhododendron Society Victoria Branch newsletter reviews the various levels of foggers and their costs in Australian dollars. They can range up to \$1,000. At the other end of the scale, I have seen one working well and the total cost appeared to be less than \$100. The principle components of a fogger is a sealed chamber that is well lit from the outside. Inside, along with the cuttings in their growth medium, is a reservoir with a small vibrator sitting in a constant depth of water. This constant depth is obtained by setting the vibrator in a small, plastic container that floats in the reservoir. The reservoir must be connected to a water

supply and controlled by a small cistern float valve in order to prevent the water drying out. The foggers are sold by aquarium stores on the island for less than \$30.

To make a fogger unit to go in your fogger box requires a number of components. Their combined cost is less than a 10th of the price of the commercial unit. These components are:-

Reservoir: The unit that produces fog [the actual 'fogger'] has to stand in water, submerged to a fixed depth. The unit is very small so it just sits in a float in a reservoir. The reservoir is any plastic container.

Cistern: To keep the water level in the reservoir constant drill a hole in the bottom of it and fit a cistern valve [as in a toilet].

Purchase this for about \$25. Connect the reservoir, via the cistern, to a water supply that goes into the hotbed or fogger box using white poly connections. They require poly glue and primer to make the system watertight. One can add a pressure reduction valve or include an inline tap.

Fogger and float: The active unit is sold to produce fog for fountains, indoor water tanks or for other similar decorative purposes. A headed one produces enough fog to produce 100% humidity in a fogger box and wet the leaves of all cuttings and produce condensation on the roof of A 6mx2mx4m propagation house.

Fan: A fan is needed to disperse the fog around the fogger box. A computer fan will do. The fan sits in a homemade wooden box on top of the fogger box connected by poly drainage pipe to a hole in the top of the fogger box. Adjust the effect of the fan by

moving it further from or closer to the fogger unit.

The success of the foggers can be seen in the following abstract from the article by Simon Begg in the above mentioned newsletter.

‘I started putting cuttings down 6 weeks earlier when the hotbed was set up, but before the fogger unit and its fan were working. I lost some early cuttings. Once the unit was fully operational success improved dramatically.

I put a lot of cuttings downand we were away 5 weeks. During that time the system looked after itself save that friends checked on Tuesdays and cleaned the fogger element. I came back to about 100 struck cuttings! Some struck but then got too wet. Hence I am now opening the doors a bit to let some fog out.

Some cuttings struck with no medium at all. For whatever reason they came out of the medium but put on roots anyway. One punnet of “Pink Jazz” was ‘involuntary’ because the parent pot fell over and some very new shoots broke off. The first day they ‘drooped’. The next day was the first the fogger was operational. The cuttings ‘stood up’. When we returned from overseas every one had struck. One punnet of laetum is of particular interest. I noticed roots growing out of the media upwards! It wasn’t that roots were lacking below the surface- the punnet was filled. I am not trimming the leaves, even big ones, at all.’

The only fogger that I have actually seen working was one used to root rhododendron cuttings and Japanese maple cuttings and

seedlings in a garden in Northern Tasmania. It appeared very simple and the cuttings were all very healthy and clearly in their element.

Autumn Colour: Stewartia pseudocamellia In Flower

Liz Murray

Trees for Interest and Shade in the Rhododendron Garden

As I write this article mid-October our *Stewartia pseudocamellia* stands amongst our Rhodos in a beautiful flame-like pyramid, infusing its colour into the landscape. This is one of our favourite companion plants in the garden. At this time of the year we are so happy that we chose this plant to add its fall colour to our garden. Its orange-red to purple colouring makes it a sight to behold. This is not the only time of the year that makes this tree so special. When the leaves have dropped and the garden appears to sleep in winter the bark on this *Stewartia* is showy, it flakes into a patchwork of green, grey, rust, terra-cotta, and cream. The twigs have an interesting pattern and the seed pods hold on. In Spring the forming buds of the leaves create a beautiful pattern as they freshen into lovely green leaves with hard round buds. Just as you are deadheading the last of the Rhodos this *Stewartia* covers itself with cup-shaped white flowers 2 1/2 inch inches wide with orangy anthers. It grows in a Pyramidal form and may reach 30-40 ft. tall, and 20-25 ft. wide after many years.



Stewartia pseudocamellia



Tofino Botanical Gardens - A Garden with a mission

“The major benefit of gardening is that it encourages humility. Much of the ‘grand scheme’ I started with in 1997 has been left behind in the mud, sweat and tears.”

George Patterson, Director

Tofino Botanical Gardens comprises twelve acres of gardens, forest, and shoreline that explore the relationship between culture and nature. Located in the Clayoquot Sound UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, the mission of Tofino Botanical Gardens is to inspire conservation of the world’s temperate coastal rainforests.

The garden has many charming and whimsical features: surprising and unique garden sculptures, a “hippie” van, a salmon troller and attractive buildings. A network of paths and boardwalks take visitors from the Café and Gift Shop through kitchen and herb gardens, the Frog Pond, and Children's Garden into the forest, where clearings have been transformed into a series of pocket gardens. Some of these gardens display plants that thrive in other coastal temperate rainforests around the world. The boardwalk and shoreline path provide insight into old growth forest with its richness and serenity.

The climate of southern Chile is similar to the west coast of Vancouver Island, and we have a Chilean plant garden featuring some common and some not-so-common Chilean plants, shrubs and trees. Many find the large-leaved “giant rhubarb” or *Gunnera* fascinating. It currently lines the edge of a parking area in the Gardens, but we have removed it from the rest of the Gardens. In other places, such as Ireland and New Zealand, this seemingly tame plant has become invasive and a threat to native species. We already deal with Scotch broom and English ivy on the Island, so removing a species before it spreads makes ecological sense.



Tofino Botanical Gardens

Himalayan Lily with Josie Osborne



Many rhododendron enthusiasts are familiar with Ken Gibson's world-renowned collection in downtown Tofino. Ken has collected, grown and hybridized for more than fifty years and has assembled one of the most impressive and important collections of rhodos in the world. In recognition and deference to Ken's accomplishment, we have planted only a few rhodos here at Tofino Botanical Gardens, concentrating on species. There is much more to discover in the Gardens – visitors are welcome year-round.

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Tofino Botanical Gardens

"Frog Pond" with the handmade gazebo

Why are the leaves on my Rhodos dying ? They look diseased!

Liz Murray

This is a question most often asked in the fall. The answer is that even though the Rhodos are evergreen they loose the bottom leaves on the stems to make way for the new ones to come from the growth buds in the spring. If the plant is healthy and it is only the bottom leaves then allow them to drop naturally.

Should I rake them up? Leaves dropping from a healthy plant can be left on the ground or raked under the plant as a mulch.

