



# NEWSLETTER

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Editor: Ian E. Efford

November 2009

## President's Message

Wow, where did the month of October go? For most our members you are heavily into the raking of the leaves that are really coming down in earnest with the rain and the winds. Think of them as mulch for the garden! Speaking of myself, I need to get busy and get my garden ready for the winter. I've been putting it off as there are plenty of flowers that still seem to be putting out some blossoms and it seems a shame have to get rid of them just yet. The coming frosts and the downpours of November will finish them in short order.

November is a great time to do any cuttings of treasured plants if you are so inclined. There is plenty of information out there on how to do it (CVRS Library books, internet, etc.). If you need some advice, there are several people in the CVRS Propagating group that can answer any of your questions. Any one of them would be more than willing to steer you in the right direction.

The fall is also a great time to plant any rhododendrons that you have been planning to put in the ground. This gives them time to get used to their environment before they really take off in the spring.

Sandra Stevenson will be sending a rather large money order off to the ARS in the next few weeks. If you still haven't paid your membership dues for 2010, please help her out by giving it to her now so she can send it all together in one large lot.

November's speaker is Janet Gardner on New Zealand gardens. She was 'down under' at a perfect time last fall (our fall, their spring) to

view some spectacular gardens. I am looking forward to her presentation.

See you at the meeting.

**David Annis**

## Coming Events

**4<sup>th</sup> November 1009**

### **Janet Gardner "New Zealand Gardens"**

Come and enjoy a visual tasting from ten days of garden tours at the Taranaki Rhododendron and Garden Festival in New Zealand.

2<sup>nd</sup> December 2009

**The Christmas Party!**

## From the Editor

Again, I make a plea for original articles!

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## RHODODENDRON SUCCESS at Chelsea Flower Show.

Millais Nurseries in Surrey, UK, won their first Gold medal for their exhibit of Rhododendrons and Azaleas at this year's Chelsea Flower Show. It is only the third time they have entered the show and they were the only specialist rhododendron grower. 'The exhibit featured an island bed showing larger growing hybrids cascading down in size through interesting wild collected foliage species, deciduous azaleas and yak hybrids, with evergreen azaleas and dwarf varieties forming the front of the exhibit'. Many of the rare plants attracted a lot of attention from the public and the perfume from the deciduous azaleas was commented on.

Due to the warmer weather the plants had to be held back at 3C in cold storage 'waiting for their time to shine'!

## From our District Director

### 1. New Alternate Director for District 1

Congratulations to Mary Parker of Nanaimo who has been elected by acclamation as the Alternate Director for ARS District 1 (BC). Having assumed this position, she is now the district's nominee for Director and will take over that job when Ron Knight's term is completed at the end of May 2010.

Mary is a veteran rhododendron collector. She is a past-president of the Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society and has experience on ARS committees. Mary is known as a very friendly and out-going person and District 1 is fortunate to have her as part of the leadership team.

### 2. The Ultimate Rhododendron Conference — April 9 – 11, 2010

The conference is being held at Canada's

premier rhododendron garden: UBC Botanical Garden, Vancouver. It's designed for all gardeners who want to learn more about rhododendrons. The conference features classroom and field experiences at two learning levels taught by Douglas Justice and Ron Knight, tours of 3 world-class gardens, rhodo sales, and on-campus suite accommodation. Veteran rhododendron collectors will enjoy Douglas' advanced classes and Ron Knight's novice classes will be a great place for newer club members to learn all the basics of rhododendron culture and care.

Conference registrations are arriving each week from rhodophiles up and down the West Coast. In November, thanks to BC Council of Garden Clubs' president Louis Peterson (former president of Vancouver Rhododendron Society), all of their members will be receiving an information package. Rhododendron club members are reminded to **send in registrations now** in order to ensure that one of the 100 conference spaces is reserved for you and you are eligible for the early booking discount (\$130 before December 31st; \$155 after). Conference details and a printable registration form may be obtained from the District 1 website: [www.rhodos.ca](http://www.rhodos.ca) (click on "registration form" and "information" halfway down the page under April 9 – 11).



Remember the Bremen Conference outlined in last month's attachments.

## Sourcing Information

**Harold Fearing**, President of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society wrote the following article for their newsletter, The Yak, edited by Brenda Macdonald.

First, what most of us do, is to make a list of those rhodos we have seen, or heard about, which we would like to have in our garden. The old standby and still most comprehensive source of information on available rhodos is "Greer's Guidebook to Available Rhododendrons". The most recent edition dates from 1996, so it is getting a bit old now, but it includes information about most of the hybrids and species which were in cultivation or available at that time. There is also a rating system - that I don't always agree with - but that at least gives some indication of which plants do better, or are perceived to have nicer flowers, better leaves, etc. than others. Since Greer's book was published there has been an explosion of information available on the internet, and there are now quite a few sites with large collections of pictures of various rhodos, both hybrids and species. Since a picture beats a wordy description any day, browsing these pictures is a good way find things you would like to have.

A good place to start on this is our own Fraser South website <http://www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth> which has been so ably managed by Chris Klapwijk. Chris has a Gallery Page with really excellent pictures of almost 300 species and hybrid rhodos. The American Rhododendron Society website <http://www.rhododendron.org> has a searchable database of more than a thousand rhodos and azaleas, with pictures of many of them. For species, the Rhododendron Species Foundation <http://www.rhodygarden.org> maintains an extensive database including pictures. There are a number of more specialized sources too. I just discovered a site with pictures and info on the 16 or so native North American azaleas <http://www.tjhsst.edu/~dhyatt/azaleas>. I have grown most of these and they do pretty well here. There is a certain satisfaction in being able to

grow native varieties. The Danish ARS chapter website <http://www.rhododendron.dk> has a lot of good pictures, with text in a mixture of Danish and English. A good site for vireyas, which are the tropical rhododendrons (houseplants in our area), is <http://www.vireya.net>. So now you have a list of those rhodos you have drooled over, and just have to have. What next? Unfortunately it is a lot easier to make a list than to find plants on the list. There are thousands of hybrids and hundreds of species, and any given source can only grow a few of these. When I first started with rhodos Ginny and I toured the local nurseries. It was a great Sunday afternoon expedition and we had a lot of fun doing it. However one soon finds that local nurseries tend to have pretty much the same varieties, and these tend to be the common hybrids particularly those easy for the nurseries to propagate. It is a good start, but one quickly exhausts most of the possibilities there. The next stage is to approach our local growers, several of whom are members of our own chapter.

These are mainly hobby growers who propagate interesting and unusual plants, often initially for their own collections, but with an excess to sell. The District 1 website <http://www.rhodos.ca>, managed by Garth Wedemire, has a list of some of these growers, with links to their catalogs of available plants. Some of these lists, including my own, are not really up to date, but they provide a good starting point for what is available locally.

Finally it is possible to import plants from the US, from one of the specialty nurseries there. In most cases I have not found this practical, though I know people have done it. One has to get the plants inspected and get a phytosanitary certificate, which involves a hassle and some expense, but it can be done. Nowadays one has to worry about importing diseases, e. g. Sudden Oak Death, so that is a consideration. The one exception though, which is practical, is to buy from the Rhododendron Species Foundation. They have spring and fall sales, with the catalogs posted on their web site. The plants are shipped en masse to UBC, with the phyto and import paperwork taken care of by the RSF. The order can then be picked up at UBC during a specified week. I have done

this for several years, as have a number of FSRS members. It works fine, and provides access to species one can't find elsewhere.

So now you have your plants, how do you take care of them? Again there is a huge amount of information on the internet. Our own FSRS website has a lot of general care information, as does the American Rhodo Society website. Henning's Rhododendron and Azalea Pages <<http://www.rhodyman.net/rahome.html>> is another good site with many good articles on rhododendron care and problems. Finally one should not overlook the expertise of members of our own chapter. We have a lot of old timers who have been growing rhodos for many years and almost without exception are willing and eager to share their knowledge with the rest of us. So don't hesitate to buttonhole people at our meetings and ask. If they don't know the answer they can often direct you to someone who does. Finally what happens when you just can't find that rhodo you absolutely must have, or the answer to that particular question? There is a relatively new phenomenon, an internet forum, which gives one access to experts all over the world. In general I have never been a great fan of these, as in many cases people seem to be posting a message just to hear themselves talk. The important content could be summarized in many fewer, sometimes zero, words. However the Yahoo group on rhodos

<<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/rhodo>> seems to be run at a much higher level than most, with a lot of the well-know experts contributing, and quite a bit of useful information. Other such forums include <<http://forums.gardenweb.com/forums/azalea>> and <<http://www.ubcbotanicalgarden.org/forums/forumdisplay.php?f=131>>.

So I hope this gives a starting point for some rhodo adventures this winter. Let me know if you come across other valuable sources of rhodo info.

### Harold Fearing



### *R brassii*

A vireya found in Indonesia and New Guinea at around 3900m. Photo by Chris Callard.

With reference to the Vireyas, the following article taken from vireya.net makes the case that this group of plants is not make up of closely related species but consists of three groups that have evolved similar characteristics. Each group is related to the other Rhododendrons differently.

### A New Classification of the Vireya Group

A new classification of the *Vireya* group has been presented by Lyn Craven and colleagues in the botanical journal [Blumea](#), published by the National Herbarium of the Netherlands.

To date, classification of the group has been largely based on the work of Dr. Hermann Sleumer (published in '*Flora Malesiana*' ser.I, vol.6, pt.4, 1966 and subsequently reprinted as '*An Account of Rhododendron in Malesia*') and more recently the revision by Dr George Argent of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh ('*Rhododendrons of Subgenus Vireya*', RHS 2006).

The system of classification of both Sleumer and Argent is based on the morphological study of the group, i.e. physical examination of plant

material leading to the establishment of groups and sub-groups displaying similar botanical characteristics (e.g. scale types, bracts, etc). Such a system of classification is essentially artificial in concept, a fact acknowledged by both authors, however serves its purpose remarkably well in bringing order to such a large group.

The new system of classification proposed by Craven et al differs in that it is based upon the phylogeny of the group - that is, the evolutionary relationships between members of the group. These relationships have been established through research at the molecular level using DNA analysis, such advanced methods now being considered the way forward in taxonomy.

The authors reject Argent's classification in which he raised the taxonomic rank of *Vireya* to that of subgenus, thereby on a par with, but separate from, subgenus *Rhododendron*. Their research indicates that what has until now been regarded as a single group, with a single evolutionary line, actually comprises three distinct groups embedded within subgenus *Rhododendron*. Indeed, the results show that one of these groups, *Discovireya*, is more closely related to other lineages within subgenus *Rhododendron* than it is to *Vireya* and *Pseudovireya* with which it had previously been connected.

Proposed changes in taxonomy generally take time to become widely accepted as further research is carried out and the finer points are debated among interested parties in the scientific world. There had been an acute need for Dr Argent's publication, *Rhododendrons of Subgenus Vireya*, for quite some time - 40 years had elapsed since Sleumer's seminal account and in many respects Argent's work brought the *Vireya* group into the 21st century, providing an invaluable source of reference for both the botanist and the layman with its descriptions of the 300+ species within the group.

This website currently follows Argent's classification and will continue to do so for the

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time being as it is with this system that many visitors to the site will be most familiar. As already mentioned, however, modern taxonomy is moving towards evolutionary classification and no doubt over time genus *Rhododendron*, including *Vireya*, will come to be presented in this manner.

So where does this leave the vireya enthusiast? From a horticultural standpoint, differing systems of classification of course make no difference to how we grow our plants but for those with an interest in the taxonomy of the group fascinating times lie ahead!

A copy of the paper is available at the website for Blumea:

<http://www.nationaalherbarium.nl/pubs/blumea/>

### *Oxydendrum arboreum*

In creating new beds for rhododendrons, consideration might be given to the Sourwood Tree, a native from Pennsylvania and Illinois to Florida and Louisiana. It makes a lovely fall statement with its scarlet leaves and in the summer with its long graceful white racemes. It likes well drained acid soil and will grow in shade, but its color will be best if grown in full sun. Zones 5 to 9. It grows very slowly in the Pacific North West and not outgrow the small garden for many years.

[Ed. Quoted from November edition of the Eugene Chapter edited by Frances Burns]

## Growing Vireyas in the Fraser Valley

Harold Fearing, President, Fraser South Rhododendron Society

[Ed. Quoted from the Yak, edited by Brenda Macdonald

.....I have to go back a few years to 2006 when Fraser South hosted the Western Regional ARS

Conference at Harrison Hot Springs. On a whim I had earlier that year bought several vireyas from the Rhododendron Species Foundation, but didn't know much about them. At that meeting I had a conversation with Glen Jamieson, who is an enthusiast and the BC expert on vireyas and, now, the new editor of the ARS Journal. He told me about them, showed me some samples and convinced me that I had made a good decision to give them a try. As most of you know vireyas are tropical rhododendrons, natives of Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and surrounding areas.



*R. celbricum*



There are some 300 species, so vireyas make up a significant fraction of the species in the genus Rhododendron. Although they are from the tropics, they grow mostly in the forests in the mountains, where it is cooler, moist and shady. Thus in the summer here they do just fine in a shaded, open greenhouse or place in the garden. Many are epiphytic, so they need very well drained soil, similar to orchids. Most do not stand freezing temperatures however, so in the winter they have to be brought inside and treated like house plants. Those that I have seen in flower, mostly at the RSF, can be spectacular as flowers, though often a bit straggly as plants.

Anyway as a result of this conversation with Glen I bought a few more at the next RSF plant sale the following year. So for several years we have been growing a half dozen or so vireyas. In the summer they are in our open poly-greenhouse where they are regularly watered by the sprinkler system. In the winter

*R. kawakamii*

we have brought them in to a table by the window in my office, and I have conned Ginny into taking care of them, watering and feeding them along with her orchids.

There are many leaf shapes and sizes, just as for the temperate rhododendron species. One I have, *R. phaeochitum*, has new leaves covered with a rusty indumentum on both surfaces, which is rather attractive. Another, *R. celebicum*, has bloomed now for two years, even as a small plant. The flowers are tubular, red or pink, and hang down in clusters of a few. Individually the flowers are not that spectacular, but at least in the second year the plant was covered with blooms, with at least some blossoms showing over several months as I remember. And another, *R. retusum*, has bloomed once, in February, with a cluster of red/orange flowers. In the house, when nothing else was blooming, they were really nice.



*R. Retusum*

So, buoyed by some success with vireya plants I ordered some seeds last year from the RSF seed exchange. They sprouted nicely and are now at the seedling stage, just a few inches high in a couple of flats. The two most successful were *R. kawakamii* and *R. armitii*. *R. kawakamii* has open clusters of light yellow flowers. It is a native of Taiwan. *R. armitii* comes from Papua New Guinea, has long tubular white or pink flowers, and from the picture looks like it will be really nice. (Thanks to Glen Jamieson for providing the pictures of these two.) But in my exuberance I didn't think about the future. This winter I can easily keep a couple of flats in the basement under lights, but next summer these plants will go into one gallon pots and next winter I will have 50 or 60 one gallon pots that have to be overwintered inside. Even Ginny, though she is a saint, is not going to allow me to bring that many pots into our living room! What to do? I don't know. Maybe I will sell some next summer, or maybe I will have some nice contributions to our raffle a year from now. In the meantime, though it has been a bit irrational, I have had fun trying out this new group of rhododendrons.



*R. armitii*