



NEWSLETTER

Volume 17, Number 7

EDITOR: LESLIE DREW

October 2006

VANCOUVER ISLAND HYBRIDS—PART 4

The Work of Bob Rhodes

by Alan Campbell

The title of my column over the last few newsletters has been “Vancouver Island Hybrids.” This month’s installment may raise some eyebrows but, I expect, no objections.

Dr. Robert C. Rhodes has been the face of rhododendron culture in District 1 of the American Rhododendron Society for perhaps five decades. While living in Maple Ridge, he began his involvement with the ARS with membership in the Vancouver Chapter, joining in 1959. Upon retiring from his medical practice in 1984, and then moving to Gabriola Island in 1988, he and his wife Jean took up membership with the Victoria Chapter, moving on to the Cowichan Chapter on its forming and are now members of the Nanaimo Chapter.

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Bob Rhodes' 'Haida Gold' — he saw promise in a seed lot

What's Coming Up

October Meeting: October 4 in St. John's Anglican Church Hall, 486 Jubilee Street, Duncan. Set-up at 7 PM, meeting starts 7:30.

Speakers: Paul Wurz, President of the North Island Rhododendron Society, who operates Hidden Acres, a rhododendron nursery north of Campbell River, will speak on Vancouver's Jack Lofthouse and his hybrids. Alan Campbell will give the short talk on how to plant rhododendrons.

Bargain Table: It's the time of year when gardeners divide many of their favourite plants, for replanting or winter storage. Please bring your spares for the bargain table. Someone will appreciate them—and the club benefits.

Tea and Goodies: Cindy and James Little* (743-6777); Liz and Allan Murray (743-9190); Beverley and Charlie Mountain (746-6339).

Directors' Meeting: October 18 at the home of Leslie Drew, 4491 Creighton Road, Sahtlam.

Propagating Group Meeting: October 21 at 1 PM. Meet at Ingeborg Woodsworth's and proceed first to the site of the Memorial Garden in the centre of the Town of Lake Cowichan, which will commemorate the early rhododendron growers Dr. and Mrs. Richard Stoker and Buchanan and Suzanne Simpson, and then to the former Cedric and Gertrude Myers garden at Honeymoon Bay, which club members are helping to restore.

Annual General Meeting: November 1, St. John's Anglican Church Hall. Election of officers for 2007.

Jim Crawford will speak on our native rhododendrons *macrophyllum* and *albiflorum*.

Christmas Party: Stan and Nyra Groves Appreciation Night; December—date and place to be announced.

Next meeting to be held November 1, 2006,
in St. John's Anglican Church Hall,
486 Jubilee Street, Duncan

The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

A Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society

PO Box 904, Duncan, BC V9L 3Y2 <http://cowichan.rhodos.ca>



President's Message

Rain, at last; if a bit late! A good day to spend on the Internet.

Our September meeting was enjoyed by one and all. We had an excellent speaker with a great topic—Japanese maples as companion plants for rhododendrons. A short segment on foliage damage experienced during the summer brought forth a good response from members and guests.

The number of guests was a special pleasure, and several took memberships.

October's speaker **Paul Wurz** will introduce us to the Lofthouse hybrids and their background. Paul and his wife **Linda** operate an excellent rhododendron

nursery, Hidden Acres, near Campbell River. They will bring some plants for sale at the meeting.

The Propagation Group have mostly built their propagation cases, and we are now looking forward to taking cuttings of favourite and rare rhodos. This month should keep all of us busy with propagation in one form or another—root division of perennials, pruning, and propagating roses and other shrubs. And while we're doing all this, let's not forget to pot up some surplus plants for the bargain table at our meeting October 4.

Happy Gardening!

☞ by *Ingeborg Woodsworth*

From the minutes . . .

Extracts from the minutes of the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society board of directors meeting September 20 at the home of **Siggi Kemmler**:

The meeting was informed that St. John's Anglican Church hall was reviewing its contract with the CVRS, and while the \$50 donation for use of the hall for each monthly general meeting would continue, a \$40 donation for use of the kitchen was requested as well as \$20 for use of the sound system and other equipment, for a total of \$110 a month. Asked to speak about kitchen use, **Maria Kemmler**, refreshments convener, said use of the kitchen facilities was essential for serving tea and coffee and cakes after each meeting. The directors decided to put the matter to a vote at the October 4 general meeting, and to pay the requested total for that meeting.

Ian Efford, sales co-ordinator for the spring plant sale, listed five ideas for the 2007 sale, which he asked the other directors to consider and give opinions on at the next directors' meeting. These were:

1. A bigger central location would be better (the 2006 sale was held in St. John's Anglican Church hall). The rabbit barn at the Exhibition Grounds had been suggested, and director **Anne Slaby**, an advocate, volunteered to check further on this possible venue.

2. With a bigger place, the number of sellers could be expanded and perhaps the sale items extended to rare plants, with invitations going to either local or Saltspring Island growers.
3. By enlarging the number of vendors, the club's portion of their proceeds could be reduced from 25% to 20%;
4. With the club now raising rhododendrons through its Propagating Group, should we buy and sell ourselves?
5. How about a truss show in the Duncan Mall a week before the sale?

Alan Campbell, programs convener, spoke briefly on speakers for coming general meetings, and a discussion on speakers' fees ensued. He recommended that \$1000 be budgeted annually for speakers, rather than \$800 as decided previously. He moved that this be put to a vote at the October 4 general meeting as he wished to speak to the motion, contending that since the club subsidizes memberships after having dispensed with its local (non-voting) membership category in favour of only full ARS memberships, it should be willing to pay more for better speakers. His motion was adopted. ☞



PROPAGATION GROUP

Making a Box for Cuttings

by *Siggi Kemmler*


At the September meeting of the Propagation Group we made some alterations to Ingeborg Woodsworth's propagating box.

We cut out the bottom and replaced it with a steel mesh, stapled along the edges. We then cut some discarded pulp machine cloth to fit, and laid that on top of the mesh. This cloth is a heavy weave of plastic fibre designed for maximum porosity to drain water from the pulp stock. Adapted to our purpose, it should allow maximum air to get to the roots of the cuttings or seedlings. We then covered this with about 40 mm of sand. That is where we left it, dusk forcing us to move proceedings indoors.

The box I built is very similar. It measures 66 × 173 cm. The sand I used is quite coarse, although this should not make any difference. I laid a 10-m heating cable over the sand, and then covered it with two layers of chicken wire. This was covered with about 40 mm of sand, followed by approximately 60 mm of soil. The metal wire serves to dissipate the heat away from the cable so that the growing medium will be evenly warmed.

Cowichan Hydroponic Supplies on Jacobs Road near Buckerfield's can order heating cable for members, who will receive a 10% discount. They quoted prices ranging from \$60 for a 3-m cable to \$76 for a 10-m cable. Dinter's Nursery also has cables, and again, for members of their Avid Gardeners Program, a discount will apply.

I bought my cable from Canadian Tire, but I do not recommend it. The cables they sell are tracer cables for frost protection. These have a thermostat that kicks in only when the temperature gets close to 0°C. For the heat to stay on, this thermostat must be removed, which is not an easy task—the heating wire which must be connected to the power cord is not much larger than a human hair. It took a lot of fiddling before the deed was done, but I can report that the cable is working fine. I will now monitor the soil temperatures.

Next on the list is the taking of cuttings. Who has good plants and is willing to donate some of this year's growth to the propagators? 



Heating cable laid over sand base



Layers of chicken wire laid over heating cable



Finished propagation box ready for cuttings



Bob Rhodes' Work

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I vividly recall my first awareness of Bob Rhodes when attending one of Sandy's and my first few meetings of the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society in 1994. While enjoying the tea after the meeting, I sidled up to a small group of elderly gentlemen deep in conversation. Bob Rhodes, Dave Dougan, and Peter Stone were discussing the merits and difficulties of growing the 'Taliense' *lacteum*. It quickly became apparent to me that this rhododendron stuff was about more than sticking a plant in the ground. If I was going to learn anything about rhododendrons, I had best get to know these men well.

The first introduction of a Rhodes hybrid into our garden was 'Bob's Blue' ('Ilam Violet' × 'Blue Diamond') (Reg. 1979) [see photo on page 5]. We chose this low-growing, violet-coloured lepidote to plant next to a pathway and bracketed it with two of Cox's 'yellow birds', 'Curlew' and 'Chikor'. The colour combination gives a nice effect.

Skirting a second pathway in our garden, we chose another small-growing hybrid of Bob's called 'Nathaniel' ('Hummingbird' × 'Elizabeth') (Reg. 1979). This bright red-flowering hybrid, named for his son, is a larger-leaved plant than 'Bob's Blue' and will grow somewhat larger and faster. Given a site with more sun than it receives in our garden, 'Nathaniel' would flower quite profusely. A sister seedling of 'Nathaniel' is 'Arlene Trustham', named for Bob's daughter.

Mention the name of Bob Rhodes to any rhododendron grower and the first corresponding hybrid that will be mentioned is 'Haida Gold' (*R. wardii* × 'Goldfort') (Reg. 1985) [see photo on page 1]. This is a fine yellow-flowered rhodo with nice green leaves and some fragrance. Having a tendency to be affected by powdery mildew, 'Haida Gold' needs full sun and good air circulation. Strictly speaking, 'Haida Gold' is not a Rhodes hybrid. In the 1960s, when everyone was trying to produce a good hardy yellow, Bob saw advertised by the Bovee-Mayo Seed Company the resulting seed from a crossing of *R. wardii* and 'Goldfort' and thought it looked promising. The best seedling from the seed lot was grown on and evaluated over several years to eventually be registered as 'Bob's Yellow' in 1979.

The most common and repeated story of how 'Bob's Yellow' became 'Haida Gold' is that at one time Bob and Jean adopted a young native girl of the Haida Nation and named the plant for her. Not quite correct. Les Clay began to reproduce 'Bob's Yellow' through his tissue culture lab as it is very difficult to propagate by cutting. Les began sending hundreds of clones of 'Bob's Yellow' to Britain and Europe, but the nurseries did not like the name, which prompted a search for a jazzier one. It was during a Rhodes holiday to the Queen Charlottes (Haida Gwaii) that the new name was conceived and the Europeans had their snappy name with a good Canadian connection. Bob's and Jean's adopted daughter was actually of the Salish Nation.

An interesting and somewhat amusing aside to this story of 'Haida Gold' concerns a visit to the Rhodes garden some years ago from Douglas and Margot Harris of England. Douglas Harris had been head gardener of Exbury, but was now running his own nursery just south of London. Mr. Harris stated that he had never heard of 'Haida Gold', but grew and sold an excellent hardy yellow called 'Bob's Yellow'. It took some time and research to convince him that it was the same clone.

Not all of Bob's work has been registered. A Triflora grex that has produced some fine plants is an example. 'Jean's Favorite' (*R. augustinii* 'Tower Court' × *R. russatum*) is very well known in Vancouver Island gardens, an airy, fine-growing plant with light lavender flowers showing a greenish-yellow blotch—one of my favourites also. Two other plants from this crossing are 'Bob's Favorite' and 'Gabriola Blue'. I have not flowered 'Bob's Favorite' as yet, but have been told that it somewhat resembles 'Electra', whereas 'Gabriola Blue' has a darker purplish-blue flower. I should ask Bob how it came about that Jean's favourite got into the trade and his favourite did not.

Many of the Rhodes hybrids interest me, but I think that I would have to pick 'Lillian Hodgson' ('Solent Queen' × 'Old Copper') (Reg. 1979) as my favourite. This is a large-growing plant with good-sized leaves of a rather lighter green and a large truss with flowers having a shell-pink edge colouring to a blending of light orange and yellow centre. The plant was named after an original member of the Vancouver Chapter

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Bob Rhodes' Work

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who became “ecstatic upon seeing the plant’s truss for the first time.” Another hybrid that intrigues me is the one called ‘Captain Bob’ (‘Red Cloud’ × ‘Gypsy King’) (not registered). There is a No. 1 and No. 2 of this cross. I grow ‘Captain Bob’ No. 2. Both Captains have a dark red flower with black spotting, but it is the better leaf of No. 2 that catches my eye with its dark green colouring and the slight twist down its length. Bob obtained the seed of this cross from Merl Cisney and selected the resulting seedlings. The next hybrid is ‘Norma Hodge’ (unknown × ‘Fabia’) (Reg. 1979), named for Bob’s first wife. The seed for this hybrid was given to Bob by Eric Langton—the man who led Bob into hybridizing—and who had crossed ‘Fabia’ with an unknown species growing in the garden of Dr. McKee of Langley. The Homer Salley and Harold Greer book on hybrids, *Rhododendron Hybrids: A Guide to Their Origins*, describes the flower as varying shades of red and rose. I’m eagerly awaiting next year’s bloom time as my copy of ‘Norma Hodge’ has set buds!

Sometime in the mid- to late 1960s, the aforementioned Lillian Hodgson received a seedling of a new cross done by Bob Rhodes, raised the plant to maturity, and registered it with the name ‘Jean Rhodes’ (‘Naomi’ × ‘Mrs. Horace Fogg’) (Reg. 1979). This pre-emptive move, without Bob’s knowledge, somewhat irked the Rhodes as Bob had chosen a different seedling of the same seed lot, which he considered superior. The seedling of Bob’s choice had a nicer flower, but apparently was not as hardy—it died off during a colder than normal winter. Perhaps Lillian Hodgson’s precipitous move held some gnostic insight. A third



Bob’s Blue’ – one of the most familiar of Bob Rhodes’ hybrids

seedling from this cross was grown on by Ken and Dot Gibson in their Tofino garden, and they have named the plant ‘Brianna’ for their granddaughter.

‘Gabriola Glory’ (*R. yakushimanum* ‘Exbury’ × *R. kingianum*) is one Rhodes hybrid that I have yet to root from a cutting, not that it is difficult to root, rather that each year this plant sets flower buds so profusely that there is no cutting material to take. One hybrid with which I have had difficulty (actually absolute failure) rooting is a yet unnamed crossing of ‘Haida Gold’ with ‘Joanita’. Another unnamed plant is a crossing of ‘Elsie Frye’ with *R. bullatum*. Just to bring things up to date here, *R. bullatum* is an obsolete name: the new name is *R. edgeworthii*. This hybrid is rather easy to root as are most of those of the *R. maddenii* group. Bob and Jean grow many tender rhodos on their ocean-side property,

but there is a cool greenhouse to shelter them should a winter turn nasty.

Here on the Island, we don’t see the hybrid ‘Camflo’ very often, but it is much sought after in the Fraser Valley. Its scarcity can be attributed to difficulty in rooting. The copy I have is a graft on ‘County of York’. When touring gardens, I have eavesdropped on many conversations in which people speculate that the name ‘Camflo’ is derived from species: “. . . it has to be *campanulatum* crossed with *floccigerum* . . .”, or “. . . no, I think it is *campylocarpum* crossed with *floribundum*,” or a number of combinations. Sorry, it’s none of these. Bob let me in on his secret: the name ‘Camflo’ is derived from the names of two of the favourite stocks in his investment portfolio. (Unfortunately he did not divulge what stocks those were.) Here again Bob received seed from a crossing done by another hybridizer and eventually chose the best seedling from the

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October in the Garden

October is a “twixt and between” month for the loving care of rhododendrons in the garden—too late for much watering because of the risk of early frosts and too early for fertilizing because of the risk of bringing on a flush of new growth. Nonetheless, there’s much that can be done to improve their looks.

Pruning of dead and badly crossing branches and a limited amount of pruning for shapeliness can be helpful. Plants with yellowish leaves can be fed Epsom

salts (magnesium sulphate) at a tablespoon or two to the gallon to restore their greenness. Otherwise, like most autumn months, it’s a good time to clean up the garden, tidy the edges, deadhead any spent blossoms left from spring, and assess the state of one’s rhodos.

The propagators will be taking cuttings this month and next, choosing new and supple growth from sought-after plants. Layering can also be done now, although early spring is preferable.


by Leslie Drew

Bob Rhodes’ Work

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lot. ‘Camflo’ is a sister seedling to ‘1000 Butterflies’, the cross of ‘Lem’s Cameo’ × ‘Pink Petticoats’ hybridized by Jack Lofthouse in 1975.

Lastly, I would like to mention ‘Dinty Moores’, not the canned stew produced in the United States, but the hybrid from *R. yakushmanum* crossed with ‘Purple Splendour’. I came across the listing in the Salley and Greer book on hybrids showing “Dr. R. Rhodes” as the hybridizer, “Wildfong” as raiser, and “R. Behring” as register (1980). I called Bob up on this one, and he had to say that he didn’t recognize the name, but did recall doing the cross and giving seed to Milton Wildfong. This is a good illustration why hybridizers need other growers. It is virtually impossible for a hybridizer to germinate all the seeds produced in a cross and grow them all on to maturity. Other willing growers are needed to help find the best plants in any given seed lot. I have not been able to find a plant of this name growing anywhere in District 1. Should any reader know of one, please let me or Bob Rhodes know—we would both like a copy.

Both Bob and Jean have garnered a vast amount of knowledge on rhododendrons and are very willing to share their experience as well as their garden, Steepsides. The ARS has recognized their dedication and accomplishments with the awarding of Bronze and Silver Medals. Should you get a chance, visit this Gabriola treasure and experience walking down a lane bordered with fragrant *maddenii* rhododendrons. 


New Members

Several people who share our interest in rhododendrons have joined the club in recent weeks.

Among them are John and Mary Hardy, who have come to Cowichan Bay from Vancouver where Mary was born, so this is her first excursion in living outside the city. She has worked professionally as a public health nurse, and finished her career working in a research project at UBC. John is returning to the Cowichan Valley. He graduated from Cowichan High School in the early 1950s, and is enjoying reunions with his old school friends. He taught English for a number of years, then went on to become editor of a tabloid newspaper, and worked in advertising and public relations before retiring.

Hilda and Don Gerrits are arrivals from Fort McMurray. At their McNeil Road property, they’ve planted several rhodos that the northern Alberta climate precluded. Why rhodos? “We like them,” says Don.

Another new member is Rose Rogan, a still young veteran of the nursery trade who started at 16 while in high school in White Rock. Besides operating her Sahtlam nursery, she has a wholesale route on the Island covering 37 retail outlets, hires local students for jobs and training, tends a blueberry field, and runs a farm. In other words, she’s quite busy. Her nursery has mostly perennials, and now she’s branching into shrubs, meaning, for one thing, rhododendrons.

And welcome back to June Wynne of Mill Bay, who has renewed her membership. 



Editor's Notebook

by Leslie Drew

In the limited time available, we discussed several aspects of leaf burn at last month's general meeting, and as one might expect this complex subject was not fully resolved.

Contributors had plenty of ideas on how leaf burn might be avoided. Anne and Roger Slaby brought a neatly prepared page of damaged leaves of various kinds of rhododendrons, and other members brought branches exhibiting leaf burn, backing up the verbal record.

Norman Todd weighed in with a wealth of experience growing species and hybrids, saying those less susceptible to high temperatures included the polyploids with their thick leaves as well as the small-leaved lepidotes. He said he had found the Hachmann hybrids to be sun-tolerant, but needing at least 1.25 cm of water twice a week. Most orange- and yellow-flowered rhodos won't take the afternoon sun.

Although there wasn't always agreement on specific plants, Norman and others listed general rules for the welfare of rhodos in these ultra-warm summers, and at the top of the list was water, plenty of it, at the rootballs. "There is no substitute for water," Norman said. "A lot depends on the plant's internal pumping system. Some plants transpire faster than their roots can supply water to the leaves."

Shade, at least partial shade, came high on the list of optimum conditions. How rhodos are planted was also important. For the benefit of all of us Alan Campbell will be speaking at the October 4 meeting on how best to plant young rhodos to give them a good start in life.

And much depends on where one gardens and whether the plants have been acclimatized. Witness Ken Gibson's email, dashed off before he left on a trip to southeastern British Columbia and the ARS Regional Conference at Harrison, in response to our question as to how his famous mountain of rhododendrons at Tofino fared during this summer's drought.



Gibson's "mountain of rhododendrons"


Said this ever-innovative grower:

I have been on a no-water diet for my plants for at least 6 years. I check newly planted plants, but even if they look thirsty I wait another day or two (before watering them).

Coarse sawdust, hydro chips, and bark mulch all contribute to retaining moisture. And, of course, the bigger the plant, the bigger the root system. Most of my plants have been lifted, and I feel this allows the plant a sturdy base.

Alto Tofino has had little or no rain since mid-July, and the plants look very well. Our proximity to the ocean is a big help, especially with the morning fog bath. I feel that fish sawdust, or mulch, is a valuable modern asset.

All in all, looking around my garden at the moment, after the rains of mid-September when I was away, I'm surprised how all the mature plants have perked up. They've lost the dejected look that came with the extreme heat, and their leaves are greener. The leaf burn on some plants fully exposed to the afternoon sun during the early onslaught still shows. And I've probably lost one or two youngsters, but that's not unexpected.

On the subject of climate change and global warming, I can't recommend highly enough *The Weather Makers* by the Australian biologist Tim Flannery, which my environment-conscious friends are reading these days. He's right up to date with solid scientific findings on how human beings are altering the world's weather, and have done so in the past. His chapter on what's happening to our weather pattern in the north Pacific is especially illuminating. 



Nominations for 2007


The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society's nominating committee has brought in a proposed slate of officers for 2007 as follows:

- **President:** *Ingeborg Woodsworth*
- **1st Vice-President:** *Ian Efford*
- **2nd Vice-President:** *Janet Gardner*
- **Secretary:** *Sharon Tillie*
- **Treasurer:** *Siggi Kemmler*
- **Directors at large, first year of 2-year term:**
Leslie Bundon, Bill Dumont
- **Directors at large completing 2-year terms:**
Roger and Anne Slaby
- **Ex-officio:** Alan Campbell

Any additional nominations will be called for from the floor at the Annual Meeting and election November 1.

According to the club's constitution, the Board of Directors is made up of the officers and four elected directors serving as members-at-large for 2 years (two being elected at each Annual General Meeting).

No one can be nominated for president or vice-president until they have been a member of the society for at least 1 year and have served a minimum of 1 year on the Board of Directors. This regulation is on the books because of the time needed for new board members to become fully acquainted with the club activities and its role within the American Rhododendron Society. It is intended to ensure a smoothly running club and quorums at directors' meetings.

So, to have experienced and eligible members for executive posts, a new category—that of second vice-president—has been introduced for next year on the recommendation of President **Ingeborg Woodsworth**. The nominee, **Janet Gardner**, is more than qualified—she is a former president and ceaseless worker for the club. 

Nematodes, Anyone?

Orders are still being taken for nematodes, the natural way of combatting the weevil that eats rhododendron leaves. Anyone wanting a batch at \$20 can phone **Ingeborg Woodsworth** at (250) 749-6291.

— 2006 Directors —

PRESIDENT	Ingeborg Woodsworth <i>mayocreekgardens@shaw.ca</i>	749-6291
VICE-PRESIDENT (Acting)	Ian Efford <i>efford@shaw.ca</i>	246-1453
SECRETARY	Leslie Drew <i>sahtlamrise@shaw.ca</i>	748-6152
TREASURER	Siggi Kemmler <i>siggi-k@shaw.ca</i>	746-8751
MEMBERS AT LARGE	Roger and Anne Slaby <i>rs0321@telus.net</i>	748-4623
	Ian Efford <i>efford@shaw.ca</i>	246-1453
	Jackie Walker <i>jacquelinewalker@shaw.ca</i>	743-3650
EX-OFFICIO	Alan Campbell <i>stonefold@shaw.ca</i>	743-3597

— 2006 Conveners —

BARGAIN TABLE/RAFFLE	Joyce Gammie Daphne Jackson Dawn Fedorchuk	246-2484 748-9475 715-1233
GARDEN CLUB LIAISON	Joyce Gammie	246-2484
GARDEN TOURS	Anne and Roger Slaby	748-4623
HISTORIAN	Bev Mountain	746-6339
INTER-CHAPTER RELATIONS	Ingeborg Woodsworth	749-6291
LIBRARIAN	Janet Gardner	748-1867
MEMBERSHIPS	Jackie Walker	743-3650
NEWSLETTER	Leslie Drew	748-6152
CHRISTMAS PARTY	Joan Clarke Mhairi Bruce	748-1272 743-8327
SPEAKERS	Alan Campbell	743-3597
SPRING SALE	Ian Efford	246-1453
SPRING SHOW	Sharon Tillie Janet Gardner	748-8254 748-1867
PROPAGATION	Alan Campbell	743-3597
REFRESHMENTS	Maria Kemmler	746-8751
SUNSHINE	Ann Springford	746-7303
WEB SITE	Alan Campbell	743-3597