



NEWSLETTER

Volume 18, Number 7

Editor: Siggie Kemmler

October 2007

2008 Membership Dues

The time is here again. The money has to go to head office in November, so please pay at the next meeting, or, if you are unable to attend, send your cheque to our membership chair, Carrie Nelson, 1720 Baldy Mountain Road, Shawnigan Lake, V0R 2W2. Thank you.



Officers for 2008

All but one position have been filled. The vacant position is that of the **newsletter editor**. Anyone who would like to step up and fill it, please come forward at the meeting or contact anyone of the officers. Siggie Kemmler is filling the need temporarily; he will be pleased to give a helping hand to any novice.



The Newsletter

Most of the members now receive their newsletters via e-mail. The few who get printed copies by mail will continue to receive the newsletter, but unfortunately it will no longer be in glowing colours. It simply is too expensive. The best price quoted comes in at \$ 0.43 per single page, the highest \$1.00 (!). Taking the low cost plus tax brings the cost per page to 49 cents per page (the \$1.00 quotation includes tax)

What's Coming Up

October Meeting: October 3 in St. John's Anglican Church Hall, 486 Jubilee Street, Duncan. Set-up at 7 PM, meeting starts 7:30.

Speakers: **Agnes Lynn** will tell us about "The 'local' Native Wildflowers (Including Our Native Rhododendrons)" - 7:30 pm

Tea and Goodies: **Cindy and James Little*** (743-6777); **Liz and Allan Murray** (743-9190); **Peter Lewis** (746-7000); *indicates team leader. Please let team leader or **Maria Kemmler** know if you can't come to the meeting.

Propagating Group Meeting: Oct. 16 at 7:30 at Al Campbell's home.

Directors' Meeting: Oct. 10 at 7:30 at Sharon Tillie's home.

Assuming the average newsletter to be six pages long, and the number of newsletters to be 9 per annum, the cost per newsletter rings in at an astonishing \$26.49 plus postage, a subsidy total of \$31.14 per newsletter mailing per year. And this is based on the low quotation! Folks, we cannot afford this. Beginning with this issue, the posted newsletters will be in black and white.

The editor



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

Now it is time for members - all of us - to come up with ideas for the direction our chapter should be taking. At our last Directors' meeting the question came up again of changing our **Regular meeting** day - first Wednesday - to first Tuesday. This would enable us to share Victoria chapter's **Speakers**. 'Speakers of Note', who would otherwise not be available to us might consider having two engagements while on the island. Also, to accommodate some of our new members, who are Garden Club members might be glad to see this change. I shall ask for your choice at our upcoming meeting.

You have seen and/or heard the **slate of officers and conveners for 2008**. It is not too late to step forward and sign in for your favorite position. We are still looking for a **Newsletter Editor**. Siggie Kemmler is only filling in till the coming year, don't forget. Also, Leslie Bundon would like to have an alternate.

Yes, Ian Efford would appreciate one of you to assist him with the **Plant Sale**, to learn and take-over the following year.

Its easy to be behind the computer today – it's raining. My newly planted rhododendron bed is getting watered 'the easy way'. Don't forget, **Fall is the best time to plant rhododendron**.

Looking forward to seeing you all at our meeting,

Ingeborg

October in the Rhododendron Garden

October is the best time to plant Rhododendrons. There should be enough moisture in the soil to allow the plant a smooth transition from the pot to the ground. If you do need to water to maintain the moisture, not a lot is lost in the warm days and cool long nights. This is also a good time to move your rhododendrons. At this time of the year there is time for root growth and the plants have a long time to go before they are required to perform with flowers and new growth, so give them a good chance, plant now.

Start with a good soil mix with 25-50% organic material such as compost, rotted manure, salt free bark mulch, decomposed sawdust or old rotted logs. The ph should be close to 5.5.

The ground that you plant into should be well drained. If you are planting in a hardpan area digging a hole and filling it with soil may create a "wash basin" effect and it might be better to consider planting above the surface of the soil. Remember that, unlike other plants which grow roots downward, rhododendron roots spread out into the surrounding soil, so make sure that the planting area is much wider than the plant.

When you take a rhododendron plant out of the pot you will likely find that it has tried to spread and therefore is quite root bound. Don't be afraid to give those roots a good scratching and breaking up; this will encourage them to get growing. We dust the soil with bone meal and organic fertilizer when planting. Be sure that the root top stays level with the ground and that the trunk is not any



deeper, because rhododendrons like to have oxygen at their roots.

If you are moving a large Rhododendron you might find the easiest way to "plant it" is really to "place it". Make a large depression or you may want to set above the ground. Spread about 6" of soil where the plant is to be placed and settle the rhododendron into place. You may want to check underneath that the roots have contact with the soil or build it up in places until it sits in the most natural way and you are satisfied with the look. Place the soil over the edges of the root ball and over it, making sure that the level covered will be the same as it was. Place soil around the root so it can spread and cover with bark mulch, making sure the trunk is not covered. Keep new plantings moist.

Liz Murray

The Question Box

Bringing on the Whites

By Norman Todd

Q *Are there any white rhododendrons?*

A The question comes from a frustrated artistic gardener. She says she searches the sales and the garden centres and cannot find a really good white rhododendron. She should not give up, but the cold hard fact is there are very few pristine white rhododendrons. Most "white" rhodos have some colour in the bud or in the throat or have some hint of shading in the petals.

White gives contrast, providing a foil for the bold strong reds and purples. I think this particular questioner, however, wants a white border with no strong colours present.

One of the purest whites is, befittingly, an old-timer. – a hybrid from the mid-1850s

– Helene Schiffner. It is of medium stature with pretty good foliage but is not seen very often these days, which is a shame. Diligent searching will pay off. A good start to the season and good for the front of the border is 'Snow Lady'. Blooming in late February in local gardens, it covers itself with white flowers. I think the chocolate anthers give depth to the plant. It is wider than tall and its fuzzy, hairy leaves look good all year. 'Senator Henry M. Jackson' is a wonderful pure white *yakushimanum* hybrid. It is not easy to find. Greer Gardens of Eugene, Oregon list it. (Greer's catalogue gives useful lists of different coloured rhododendrons but lists no whites; they are all classified as White/Blush). The Senator's wife is also pretty good-looking. She has, at least initially, a little colour in her cheeks. I was told that the original plant of 'Senator Jackson' was planted out in the grounds of the State Capitol in Olympia, Washington but was stolen within the first few days of being on exhibition.

My best landscaper customer cannot abide the next plant but I find it very useful for a sunny spot: 'Dora Amateis'. It is not too big – a lepidote with leaves 3 to 5cm – and it does have a mauveish cast to the bud but, in full sun, it will look like a little igloo in April. A most desirable dwarf; also hard to find is Peter Cox's 'Egret'. Its flowers are tiny hanging bells. The next is perhaps not the most shapely plant, but I wouldn't be without it – 'Mildred Amateis'. It is an interesting plant, as it is a cross between a toughy from the eastern U.S. and a semi-tropical Asiatic. The latter – *edgeworthii* – gives it a delightful fragrance of nutmeg. I have no 'nose' and would never make a wine taster, but Mildred surely gives you a hit when walking past it in May.

There is a good selection of later blooming whites of larger stature. The easiest to find is probably 'Polar Bear'. July blooming and tree-like, it too is fragrant. This comes from both of



its parents – *diaprepes* and *auriculatum*. Both are large plants. Our *auriculatum* (the white form; it also comes in pink) was, we think, 26 years old before it had its first bloom. The late princess Abkhazi delighted in recounting how she waited 40 years before enjoying its August blossoms. For an easy to grow late May bloomer, beloved by landscapers, *catawbiense* ‘Album’ provides a good form all year.

I admit, considering the number of rhododendron hybrids there are, the whites are not very plentiful. They do exist and are worth some effort to find. I could not end without mentioning of one which not all of us can grow outside. This one is truly spectacular: huge, lily-like trumpets of trusses of three or four with a little yellow in the throat, nicely textured



Snow Lady
An early bloomer with good foliage

leaves on an upright, tallish plant. Mi Amor is a show stopper. I have mine on a north-facing wall. I put it in the green house last winter when the temperature went down to – 9° C (the coldest we have had in our 30 years in this garden) and I am glad I did, but it is now too big to move. The buds are obscenely fat so I’m relying on global warming to let them burgeon open.



Southern Victoria: A Gardening Equivalent

The gardeners of Melbourne and of the southern edge of the State of Victoria are very keen rhododendron growers and have many beautiful rhododendron gardens. Overall, the climate is similar to that in the Cowichan Valley, dry summers and wet winters, with an average temperature a little higher, especially in summer. In the very lovely Dandenong Hills, an eastern suburb of Melbourne, where the National Rhododendron Garden is situated, there is a little more precipitation as the higher altitude catches the rain that travels along the whole length of the south coast of Australia from west to east. An excellent glimpse of the rhododendrons that are grown and these beautiful gardens can be found on a special website of the Victoria State Branch of the Australian Rhododendron Society [ARS] - <http://picasaweb.google.com/ARSVic>. It is necessary to download the free programme Picasa to see these pictures.

In the case of vireyas, Simon Begg of that Branch has developed a link on that same web site for photos that are well worth reviewing. We do not grow many on the island, but with climate warming, more will grow. In my opinion, they are the most beautiful of all rhododendrons with extraordinarily delicate colours.

He says: “The common link is that I have taken all the photos; some at RBGE [Royal Botanic Garden Edinborough], some at "Beechmont" [including some Andrew Rouse Species] and some at Lyn Craven's. The photos are shown alphabetically. They can't compare with the number of species that Chris Callard shows; however the files are bigger so more usable when downloaded. I am more than happy to supply full sized files on DVD to any who want them. I am trying to capture a plant as well as flowers where possible. Some photos taken at RBGE are poor photos that I hope to get another go at next May. I hope to add more species this coming year as my ARS recent acquisitions flower for the first time, [and] I capture the flowers on digital. I am finding the photos are a very useful first check in identifying doubtful plants.”



Finally, the Victoria Society does send out a newsletter by e-mail during their winter season. If anyone wishes to see a copy, please send me an e-mail, and I will forward one. I am sure that the Victoria Branch would be willing to put you on their mailing list for further copies. Alternatively, you can join the ARS, through the Victoria Branch and receive their national journal as well.

Ian E. Efford

The Mighty Dwarf

In September last year Maria Kemmler returned from the district meeting at Harrison Hot Springs with a few bonsai azalea cuttings which she had collected off Roger Low's bonsai demonstration table. Wrapped into a wet paper towel she passed them on to Sigg, asking him to try and root them. A few days later he did, and they did -- all eight of them. Sigg gave me a couple and I put them with my seedlings as they were smaller than some of my seedlings and obviously needed more growth before I found them a permanent home. After a while I was surprised to see a large flower among the seedlings and discovered that one of the bonsai was in full flower. A 5cm diameter flower on a 5cm plant!



The Mighty Dwarf

Now that this mighty dwarf has gained my attention, a couple of questions arise. It appears that this plant is far too small to have been root trimmed to create a bonsai -- so what species has been used?

Leslie Drew identified it as a member of the kurume group, which means a cultivar of the species *R. kiusianum*. This species is from the mountains of Kyushu, Japan where it is described as compact with a dwarf habit and deciduous leaves. It usually only grows to about 60cm without root trimming. I have a few rhodo books and about 100 gardening books and none mention bonsai azaleas although the kurume are mentioned on bonsai websites. More information would be interesting.

Ian E. Efford

R. macrophyllum at Mt. Elphinstone

There are at least three locations where our native rhododendron is flourishing: Rhododendron Lake west of Nanaimo, Weeks Lake near Shawnigan and the Skagit Valley (Manning Park). Last year another small grove of our native rhododendron was discovered at Mt Elphinstone on the Sechelt peninsula.

Ron Knight reports that District 1 chapters will get some seedlings at the March meeting, for garden testing. Ron will be collect seed this week (Sep 16 – 23) and Dean Gourd will try for more seedlings. If they sprout, some will be for garden testing and a few hundred will be planted in an isolated area of the Sunshine Coast, protected already, to hopefully form a satellite population.



Four Contributions to the Landscape

Shrubs are now known to make major contributions to the landscape.

First, they provide a gradation of height between tall landscape elements such as trees or buildings, and low ones such as flowers, lawn or ground covers mimicking the aesthetically pleasing canopies that exist in nature and allowing the eye to move easily about the landscaped space. Foundation plantings, simply plants grown in front of buildings, are frequently composed of various shrubs, either alone, or in combination with other plants.

Second. Plants which range in height from only a foot or so to as high as 20 feet can take the place of trees as the tallest plant elements.

Third. These plants are often used as hedges.

Fourth. Shrubs can be used as groundcover to stabilize a landscape slope susceptible to erosion. Such slopes might be difficult to mow even if the gardener could establish a lawn there (a ground cover of creeping phlox in various shades imitates a wild mountain meadow and needs no maintenance at all). Many such areas can be effectively planted with one or more of the shrubs which spread by underground roots or have branches that spread across the ground, such as the red osier dogwood, weeping forsythia, creeping juniper, fragrant sumac, Japanese rose, memorial rose, and snow berries.

These four landscape values are an addition to what whatever attributes the plants themselves possess: beauty of leaf or bloom, winter interest, edible fruit, etc..

I, Woodsworth



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