



NEWSLETTER

Volume 22:7 Editor: Ian E. Efford October 2011

President's Message

Last month I briefly outlined the financial position of our society in which the plant sale is one of our major sources of funds, a significant public face for the society and a major social activity where many members work together to achieve our objectives. It is worth a few minutes to review just what are those objectives.

Here they are in point form:

- to raise money for the society;
- to help specialized rhododendron nurseries by offering a targetted market;
- to make a diverse range of rhododendrons available to our members and the public;
- to publicize the activities of the society and attract new members;
- to support and encourage other plant clubs in the valley;
- to provide educational opportunities about rhododendrons for the public; and,
- to demonstrate the beauty and diversity of rhododendrons.

We try to achieve these objectives through a variety of means:

- planning and manage the plant sale;
- including a truss display attended by a member who can answer visitors' questions;
- attracting visitors by advertising;
- offering short seminars and demonstrations during the sale;
- raffling off a variety of garden related products as part of the sale;
- attracting the major specialized rhododendron nurseries;
- changing the public face of the sale from a rhododendron sale to a "Garden Fair";
- inviting other nurseries to attend to compliment the rhododendrons;
- offering free booths to support plant clubs and organizations in the valley;
- attracting attendees by offering free gifts to customers; and as of last year,
- inviting gardening suppliers to have booths at the show.

Coming Events

October 5
Bill McMillan: "Selected English Gardens & Birds"

November 2
Gerry Gibbens: "The Rhododendrons at VanDusen Gardens"

December 7
Christmas Party

February 1
Bill Terry: "The Perfect Garden: Plant Hunting in Tibet"

Firwood Nursery in Saanich, one of the major rhododendron nurseries on the island, is closing. The owner, Norman Todd, has offered the five societies on the island plants at a very considerable discount. Bill Dumont and I, with the approval of the Executive, have been to the nursery and selected a large number of excellent plants to be made available at cost to our members. These plants will be outside the back door of the church on Wednesday evening from 7-7.30 pm before the meeting. Payment will be received in cash or cheque.

You will not find rhododendrons of this quality at lower prices anywhere!!

Ian E. Efford

Many rhododendron societies combine their plant sale with a competitive truss show. This may have been the case at CVRS in the past but we do not do it at the moment.

I joined the society in 2004 and took over the plant sale the next year. In that year and the next, it was held in a very cold and drafty barn in the old Exhibition grounds. As pneumonia was likely to decimate our membership, we moved to St John's Church the following year and then to the excellent gymnasium at Queen of Angels School for two years. Although this hall was ideal, it became very crowded and so last year we made a leap of faith and rented the large hall at the new Exhibition Grounds. At seven times larger we were concerned that the hall would appear empty but, in fact, it turned out to be an excellent fit and the hall has been booked for next year.

Financially, we did quite well this last year. The increased cost was offset by renting space to companies selling garden-related products. This addition also added variety which attracted more visitors and allowed some cost savings by joint advertising. The new format of a "Garden Fair" and rhododendron sale seems to be the way we should go in the future.

At the moment, our income comes from a 20% take on all plant sales as the nurseries do not pay rent for their booths. We do not charge a percentage on the sale of non-plant products but we do charge those companies rent. It would help the nurseries if we could reduce that percentage and I think that this should be a long-term objective. In part, it will depend on how many companies will rent large booths next year. I should note that three or four additional companies are interested. One large vendor, that has expressed interest in attending, has proposed that we have a specific website for the Garden Fair. At the last Executive meeting, it was agreed that we would initiate a review of the idea and associated costs.

Finally, the success of the plant sale depends on the combined effort of most of our members. You do an excellent job and deserve praise for your efforts. As it is your sale, how we run it depends on your support and opinions. If you have views on anything I have said in this summary, please let me or one of the members of your executive know and we will consider any proposed changes.

Bill McMillian, a past president of the Victoria Rhododendron Society is our next speaker and I hope to see you all there.

Ian Efford

From the Editor

I have noticed an almost complete absence of honey bees in gardens that I visited this summer. In one case, I examined a *Deutzia* in full flower for some time without seeing one honey bee. I have seen wasps going from flower to flower carrying out some of the role of honey bees but they are by nature fruit and carrion eaters, not pollinators. Although rhododendrons are largely pollinated by bumble bees, the absence of honey bees does not bode well for the other plants in our gardens. Without the means to bring the honey bees back quickly, or at all, one easy alternative is to substitute mason bees. For that reason, this newsletter contains an article on these small, hard-working bees.

Ian E. Efford

FYI ...

1. I will be away hunting plants in New Zealand from the 17 October to the 23 November. During that period, Sandra Sanderson will be in charge and Bill Dumont has kindly offered to take over as editor. Sandra's contact are already listed in this newsletter and Bill's e-mail is wedumont@shaw.ca. He would welcome any articles that would be suitable for the newsletter.

I will see you all at the Christmas Party!

2. The Victoria branch is publishing a compendium of 75 articles by Norman Todd, one of our best known rhododendron nursery owners and also a well-respected and humorous author on subjects related to the genus. Our society will purchase 30 of these books for re-sale to members and other interested gardeners. They might be available for the November meeting.

3. The collapse of a main server in Dallas resulted in the complete collapse of all of the District 1 branches websites, including our own. Garth Wedermire, our district webmaster, worked hard to restore our site and it is now working and greatly improved. You should go to <http://cowichan.rhodos.ca/contact/> to see the result. More information will be added over time. Thanks Garth!

Ian E. Efford

Mason Bees

Steve and Gail Mitchell, Bee Haven Farm

The Mason Bee, also known as the Blue Orchard Bee (*Osmia lignaria*) has been used by gardeners as a pollinator for at least 20 years.

There are 160 species of this genus throughout the world, with a predominantly holarctic (northern latitudes) distribution. In the Cowichan Valley we have two common species and five to six putative species have recently been found in a Garry Oak preserve.

Due to the recent problems with Honey bees, there has been a growing interest in managing these native, solitary bees. *O. lignaria* and *O. texana* are attracted to artificial nesting sites, such as drilled wooden blocks or paper/cardboard straws.



Solitary bee *Osmia*

Honey bees are a colonial species, developing colonies of many thousands of workers (sterile females), one queen (the reproductive female) and, depending on the season, several hundred drones (males). Mason bees, on the other hand, are called solitary because, although they will nest in a cluster of tunnels very close to each other, there is no organizational cooperation or caste system. Each female Mason bee is capable of producing offspring. Unlike honey bee queens, she only produces a small number of eggs and dies after a few weeks of activity.

By mid-summer Mason bees are not evident. The adults, who were active from late March to early June, have died. The eggs laid in the tunnels have hatched, and the larvae are in their late stages before pupating. All this happens in the tunnels behind a sealed mud

closure. New adult bees are completely formed by late September, and enter a dormant phase inside the cocoon. The life cycle is effectively completed.

There are a variety of nest box designs. Solid blocks of wood drilled to the correct diameter ($5/16^{\text{th}}$ of an inch or 7.5 mm, and to a depth of 6 inches or 15 cm) have been used extensively. The disadvantage of these boxes is that cocoons cannot be removed for cleaning and storage. Straws are available for purchase, or one can simply roll paper around a pencil and fasten with tape, bending one end to make a blind tunnel. These can be readily opened to remove cocoons. If you already have solid blocks, a popular type of nest box consists of drilling the holes to a slightly larger diameter to accommodate straw inserts of the correct dimension.



We use a lot of the wooden or plastic trays which split apart for easy removal of cocoons.

If the nest design allows, in November or December, these cocoons can be removed, cleaned and stored. Cleaning is recommended to reduce numbers of pollen mites which can impact the next generation. Cocoons are best stored in a cool, dry, dark location. Cocoons should not be sealed in airtight containers as some oxygen is necessary for their survival.

The emergence of bees is triggered by daytime temperatures of 10° C or more. However, if the target crop, such as pears or plums is not in flower, the cocoons should be held in a refrigerator, at 6 to 8°C, until flower bud break of the target crop. Should it be necessary to resort to this storage, the humidity inside the refrigerator should be increased so that the bees do not become desiccated. A dish of water or moist paper towel near the storage container should do the trick. Paper towels will need to be remoistened daily.

Nest boxes can be put up when there are some flowering plants in your garden. Crocus is a good plant to watch for early bees. We often find the first Bumble bees visiting these flowers and Mason bees will visit them too. Even if you are stalling your Mason bees until fruit trees

blossom, it is interesting to put up one or two nest boxes to see if any “wild” Mason bees are emerging in your yard. You may be surprised to find where they have nested – under shingles, or any small hole. Once we found our barbecue gas line plugged with a Mason bee nest.

Males emerge first followed by females a few days later. When you are ready to put your cocoons out, have ten or twenty in a release container (eg. a medicine vial with a hole drilled in the lid or a match box with a notch cut out) protected, and very near the nest box.

Once the females become active it is fun to watch them enter a tunnel – head first to deposit nectar or back in to deposit pollen or lay an egg on the pad of pollen. After each egg, they create a separation wall of mud before repeating the process. Each female may fill one to three tunnels with about eight eggs in each tunnel. The deepest eggs (which are fertilized) in the tunnel will develop into female bees. Three to five (unfertilized) eggs that are closest to the entrance will develop into male bees.

This concentration of larvae can be attractive to predators. The small species of woodpeckers such as the Hairy or Downy, may dig into these tunnels. Predator guards are available on some commercial nest boxes. Otherwise be vigilant!

There is also a tiny wasp that can find its way into these tunnels, penetrate the cocoon with a very long ovipositor, and lay its eggs on the Mason bee pupa. When this happens, a whole clutch of tiny wasps eventually emerges from the cocoon, which should have produced one Mason bee. To protect our Mason bees from this parasitic wasp, we carefully take down our nest boxes when we are confident that the Mason bees have finished (this year it was early June for us). We wrap the boxes in a very fine nylon cloth and store them until November or December, when we know that the cocoons are ready to be removed and cleaned. It is necessary to be gentle when taking nest boxes down, because the larvae will be at a very young stage at this point, and any sudden movement could dislodge them from their food source (pollen pad).

There are a couple of good sources of detailed information about Mason bees. See “Pollination with Mason Bees” by Margriet Dogterom. Dr. Dogterom also has a DVD, and an assortment of Mason Bee equipment. Her website is: www.beediverse.com. A second reference we find useful is “How to Manage the Blue Orchard Bee” by Jordi Bosch and William Kemp.

Here at Bee Haven farm we have been raising Mason bees for over five years. Nest boxes and bees are available for purchase at several of the nurseries or feed stores around Duncan. Mason bees are also available from us.

Steve and Gail Mitchell,
Bee Haven Farm 250-746-9916

Rhododendron Memorial Park, Lake Cowichan

Ingeborg Woodsworth

Progress - This park represents the efforts of the combined work of members of the CVRS and the Communities in Bloom, Lake Cowichan. We have planted and continue to care for Phase 1 as well as preparing for Phase 2 of the Lake Cowichan Rhododendron Memorial Garden. And, yes, we are always looking for more helpers from CVRS as well as the communities.

We are fortunate to have received, through CVRS, this year a US\$2,500.00 Grant from the ARS for this Phase 2 of the garden. We are continuing with original plants, some propagated species, evergreens and maples within the 2 acre property donated by the Town of Lake Cowichan. These plants are sited along invitingly groomed trails winding through an old growth habitat of evergreens and maples. This area is being kept in its natural state and is enhanced with seasonal waters. Our plans this year include placing a necessary second bridge to continue the trail extension to the end of Cowichan Avenue, providing a circular route within the garden and a second entrance.

The Town of Lake Cowichan has designated parkland for the rhododendron garden with Beaver Creek running through it, and has committed to the perpetuity of this project in the form of maintenance. This will preserve the continuity of the history in our town of the plants and will provide ongoing education in many forms. Beaver Creek is a local site managed by the Lake Cowichan Salmonid Enhancement Society. Last year we had an arborist come and remove all the dangerous trees and limbs for the safety of the visitors as we prepare for the continuation of the trail in this setting so that it will draw people through the garden and will have two entrances with educational signage. At the present entrance is the park watering system that ties into the town water supply.

We strive to continue our relationships with near-by high school and Scout/Girl Guide troops for the purpose of having them work alongside us in the preparation for and care of the garden. We continue to see the potential for five phases of this project as the donated land is on both sides of Point Ideal Road with boulevards being utilized to draw attention to the trail beginnings. Phase 2-4 will encompass three manageable plots of land, which with Phase 1 and 5 will make up the entirety of the park. The fifth phase will include *R. macrophyllum* at the Trans-Canada trail end in Lake Cowichan, which is located across the main road from this Memorial Park. The challenge has been given to the Trans-Canada committee in Duncan, B.C., to meet us halfway on the trail between us with rhododendrons indigenous to the Pacific Coast area.

The objective of this memorial park is to provide a variety of different settings for this genus and a unique horticultural interest, not just to ARS District 1 members, but also to international rhododendron enthusiasts who have already visited and expressed interest. This garden will provide education on the local history and propagation of rhododendrons and azaleas. We have the opportunity to provide species that are no longer in cultivation. Presently we have over 110 plants onsite, with the initial plants being donated by Finnerty Gardens at the University of Victoria and approximately a quarter of the later plants coming from the CVRS. The CVRS propagation group continue to document their findings as they cultivate new plants from seed and cuttings.

The local history of rhododendrons in and around Lake Cowichan, including our plants origins and propagation, are in booklet form at the Kaatza Museum and Tourist Information Centre, both of which are across the street from the park. The museum also holds our library of rhododendron books, for visitors to peruse and we are listed in the Lake Cowichan self-guided walking tour brochure located at the Tourist Information Centre.

The relationship with local schools and groups fulfills the criteria of education as it allows the schools kids to earn credits and the local Scout/Girl Guides to earn badges. Educational signage is in place at the Point Ideal Road entrance alongside a bench placed as a resting spot along this well-travelled road leading to an upscale neighbourhood and the town's only marina on Lake Cowichan. As the town's visitors arrive in the spring, summer and fall months, upwards of 3-

fold, many drive to the marina or park at the open riverside picnic/park across Point Ideal Road for the river rafting on the Cowichan River and visit the Tourist information and have been seen walking through and resting in the park. Overflow parking is on Point Ideal Road. With the extension of the trail and adjoining gardens this trail will be accessible from both sides, both with parking. Signage at the proposed new entrance will draw visitor's attention to the importance of the area and its heritage of rhododendrons, and list various plants within the park.

Monies for this project come from the Town of Lake Cowichan through Communities in Bloom-Lake Cowichan in the way of funds to help cover the cost of caring for and transplanting specimens as well as hard landscape. As well we rely heavily on donations from businesses in the form of needed materials and individuals who have an interest in garden, as well as the members of the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society. If you would care to help us some time, please, contact:

Ingeborg Woodsworth, [250.749.6291 or mayocreekgardens@shaw.ca].

The Mid-Island Rose Society on Vancouver Island. We have organized an English Garden Tour

9 NIGHT HOSTED DELUXE ENGLISH GARDEN TOUR
May 23 – June 2, 2012

This fully hosted tour will take you through eleven of the spectacular gardens of Southern England, plus enjoy a sightseeing day at St. Ives, Land's End and the impressive St. Michael's Mount.

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Our Rhododendrons in the Cowichan Valley

Ian E. Efford

For the past few years we have donated \$500 worth of plants to a public garden somewhere in the Regional District. In one case the plants went to the Vancouver Island University campus behind the Superstore on condition that they be moved to the new campus when built. This has now happened.



The plants are well located, right in the entrance area of the campus, and appear to be looked after as they benefit from irrigation. At one point the university said that there would be no irrigation on the campus but idea seems to have been rejected.

The plants are complimented by another large area of rhododendrons on the other side of the entrance walk. These latter plants appear to be planted far too close together and will need at least a 50% cull within a couple of years.

Another one of our annual gifts was to the Lake Cowichan Memorial Garden. We recently received a \$2,500 grant from ARS towards the expansion of this garden and the article by Ingeborg Woodworth in this issue describes the present progress of that effort.

Finally, this year's gift was to the North Cowichan Municipality in order to beautify the new soccer fields on Somenos Road. These plans have, however, changed and these plants will now be directed towards the entrance to Crofton. We expect them to be planted in October and more information should follow.

The site for the 2012 gift is open for discussion and your views and suggestions should be forwarded to me or one of the other members of your Executive. All ideas will be considered and a choice made in the New Year. The criteria include the recipient being a non profit or government organization owning the land in a public location. We want the passing public to see the plants! The site should also be suitable for rhododendrons and have continuous maintenance.





2011-2012 Executive

Past President: David Annis
President: Ian Efford
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Vice President: Sandra Stevenson
(pinchofherbs@shaw.ca 250-748-557)
Secretary: Leslie Bundon
Treasurer: Bill Dumont
Membership: Marie Jacques

Members at Large

Bernie Dinter, Joe Hudak, Elaine Kitchen,
Christopher Justice

Convenors

Sunshine: Mary Gale
Tea: Debra Kobulka
Raffle: Hilda Gerrits
Club Liason: Alan Campbell
Library: Dixie Mueller
Programme Co-ordinator: Alan Campbell
Website and Newsletter Desktop Publisher:
Contractor-Mary-Lynn Boxem
Newsletter Editor: Ian Efford
History: Mona Kaiser (pending) and Liz Murray
Garden Tours: Ingeborg Wordsworth (pending)
Plant Sale: the team
Facility Liason: Roy Elvins
Christmas Party: The team

A Most Interesting Small Garden

The last meeting of the ARS District 1 took place under the leadership of our District Director, Mary Parker from Nanaimo. The meeting, arranged by the Vancouver Rhododendron Society, was at the meeting room in Park and Tilford Gardens in North Vancouver. This 3 acre garden is on the site of the old Park and Tilford Distillery and the conditions of 1969 sale of the site to a shopping centre developer included the requirement that a public garden should be included in the development. The result is a small walled garden that has walks lined by walled raised beds containing eight separate theme gardens absolutely full of different plants. I was ignorant of the existence of this garden and delighted to visit it and spend a short time walking around in an absolutely peaceful setting right in a busy shopping centre plaza. I have been thinking for some time that Duncan needs a botanic garden, not one on a grandiose scale but something small and intimate that will be a haven of enjoyment and peace for the local population as well as a tourist attraction. The Park and Tilford garden is an example of something on the right scale that could be developed within a reasonable budget. I am sure the local gardening community would provide volunteers to maintain such a facility.

Ian E. Efford



An Opportunity?

We are always seeking economic development opportunities for the Cowichan Valley. Joan Gibb, a government scientist, who was visiting Darjeeling, West Bengal, India discovered a company manufacturing **Rhododendron Squash**. It appears to cure many ailments.

Do we have enough plants in the valley to begin a small industry?

COWICHAN VALLEY RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

Programme for 2011-2012

7:30 pm at St John's Anglican Church

163 First St, Duncan, BC V9L 1R1

(1st and Jubilee)

September 7	Siggi Kemmler and Ken Webb "Rhododendron Nurseries in North Germany"
October 5	Bill McMillan "Selected English Gardens and Birds"
November 2	Gerry Gibbens "The Rhododendrons at VanDusen Gardens"
December 7	Christmas Party
February 1	Bill Terry "The Perfect Garden: Plant Hunting in Tibet" Co-Sponsored with the Cowichan Valley Garden Club
March 7	Geoff Ball "Milner Garden and its Rhododendrons"
March 20	District 1 Executive Meeting
April 4	Bill Bischoff "A Prize Winning Garden in the Making"
May 2	Dennis Bottemiller, Rhododendron Species Botanic Garden "Variables in Propagation of Rhododendron Cuttings"
May 5	Garden Fair and Rhododendron Sale
June 16	Summer Picnic