



NEWSLETTER

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September 2007

↪ A Surprise Invitation ↪



A surprise invitation from **Peter Lewis** gave other CVRS members a great surprise—and a garden-going treat—in June. For the story on an amazing private garden in the Cowichan Valley, see Page 5.

Slate for 2008 Lines Up

Nominations for officers of the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society for 2008 were presented to the Board of Directors at their meeting August 15 by the nominating chair **Janet Gardner**.

Any further nominations are invited from members from now and at the annual meeting in November.

The list for 2008 so far: President, **Ingeborg Woodsworth**; First Vice-President, **Ian Efford**;

What's Coming Up

September Meeting: September 5 in St. John's Anglican Church Hall, 486 Jubilee Street, Duncan. Set-up at 7 PM, meeting starts 7:30.

Speakers: **Janet Gardner** and **Sharon Tillie** will give an illustrated talk on Pacific Northwest gardens they visited this spring. It's titled "Janet and Sharon's Most Excellent Adventure".

Tea and Goodies: **David Annis*** (748-1338); **Doris and Ian Anderson** (746-9678); **Ruth and Michael Ker** (748-7791).

* indicates team leader. Please let team leader or **Maria Kemmler** know if you can't come to the meeting.

Propagating Group Meeting: September 11 at 7:30 PM at the home of **Siggi and Maria Kemmler**, 3730 Gibbins Road.

Directors' Meeting: September 12 at 7:30 PM at the home of **Ingeborg Woodsworth**, Mayo Creek Gardens, McLean Road, off Mayo Road, off Old Lake Cowichan Highway.

ARS Western Regional Conference: Newport, Oregon, September 21–23. See story Page 4.

International Rhododendron Conference: Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, Scotland, May 7–11, 2008. Hosts are the Scottish Rhododendron Society and the RBGE, celebrating 50 years of exploration, conservation, and hybridizing.

Second Vice-President, **Janet Gardner**; Secretaries, **David Annis** (minutes of regular monthly meetings) and **Janet Gardner** (minutes of directors' meetings and correspondence); Treasurer, **Siggi Kemmler**; Members-at-Large, **Leslie Bundon** and **Bill Dumont** (completing two-year terms), **Sharon Tillie** and another director (starting two-year terms); and Ex-Officio, **Alan Campbell**.

Members willing to join the board as the fourth member-at-large are being asked to step forward. ↪

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

Greetings to you all!
Reluctantly I get to my computer to attend to club business and meeting agendas. What a summer! The late start brought a greater abundance of flowers and healthier growth for all shrubs and other plants, at least in my garden. Sure, a few leaves have been burned by rather intense sun, but nothing too severe.

It's time for members to come forward to help with club activities. We should all take pride in what our club achieved last year. We seem to be a model in recruiting new members to the district and the ARS. Various requests have come my way to help other groups. Please, do let **Janet Gardner**, our nominating chair, know what expertise you

can offer in the coming year. It does not necessarily mean that you have to hold a position on your own; committees of three people (new members consider this) can easily solve anything.

The Western Regional Conference is in Newport, Oregon, September 21–23. Several of our directors will be attending, and there's still room for you, too. Besides other workshops and educational programs, a panel discussion by three knowledgeable people on climate and weather is of particular interest to me.

Looking forward to our next meeting.

by Ingeborg Woodsworth

Plant Sale Site Ideal

by Ian Efford

In my third year as co-ordinator of the CVRS plant sale, the stars finally aligned—we had a good location, an outpouring of volunteers, and excellent nursery participation. The result was an increase in sales (see Treasurer **Siggi Kemmler's** summary at right), and the income to the society rose above the last two years.

I would like to thank all the volunteers and particularly **Anne Slaby** for taking over publicity and doing such a good job at low cost. I should also thank **Gordon McGuire**, the caretaker of the Exhibition Grounds, for his help. Our raffle was more successful this year than previously. Prizes were solicited from **Country Grocer** and **Buckerfield's** by **Leslie Bundon** and the tickets were sold by **Judeen Henrickson** and **Hilda Gerrits**. We also received income from the members' table where we sold plants donated by the members themselves.

In addition, thanks go to the volunteers who organized an information table in the Duncan Mall for the three days before the sale. This display of flowers and information went well, but did not attract a large audience from the shopping public. Until Duncan has its first "real" mall, this marketing effort should be abandoned.

The rabbit barn at the Exhibition Grounds was ideal for

the sale in that it let nurseries drive right up to their booths and gave everyone plenty of space. Lighting could have been better, as we had to keep the large doors open before the sale began. This caused a demand that the sale start early and some chaos resulted. Next year, the doors must be kept closed until 10 AM and no sales should take place before then.

I have agreed to co-ordinate the plant sale for one more year and have booked the rabbit barn, which will again be available, but would like to see a volunteer work with me in the spring of 2008 to be ready to take over in 2009. Most of the tasks are now de-bugged and documented clearly so that the job will be lighter for the next co-ordinator.



Prize winners were **Greg and Stormie Holland**, Duncan; **Ian and Doris Anderson**, Duncan; **Martin Walsh**, Duncan; **Ed Manikelow**, Chemainus, and **Richard Tronter**, Duncan.

Plant Sale Revenues

| | |
|----------------|--------------|
| Sales Receipts | \$5,791.00 |
| To Growers | (\$4,632.80) |
| CVRS table | \$73.60 |
| Greer Guides | (\$37.10) |
| Raffle | \$177.00 |
| Rent | (\$232.50) |
| Expenses | (\$187.59) |
| To Club: | \$951.61 |



THE QUESTION BOX

Azaleas vs. Rhodos

by Norman Todd

Q Are azaleas rhododendrons?

A A glance at the headlines in the newspapers will confirm that the classification of the genus *Rhododendron* is not among the most pressing of the world's problems. At times, however, it can become a very heated topic.

About 20 years ago, the fourth International Conference on the Taxonomy of Rhododendrons was held in Kent, Washington. There were over 300 people in attendance, among them four Chinese scientists, the first to attend one of these conferences since the end of the Second World War.

Inasmuch as the Chinese have about half of the world's species growing in their own backyard, they justifiably considered that their input was extremely significant. Their methodology was extremely classical—the traditional morphological approach of **Linnaeus**. The North Americans and Europeans had been examining more esoteric ways including the biochemistry of the plants. This resulted in disparities between Chinese taxons and Western taxons and the discussion became heated. I recall wondering whether there might be an outbreak of fisticuffs, but the chairman was competent and banged his gavel and said, “Ladies and gentlemen, please remember this is a serious subject but not important.” Order was restored.

This took place before DNA analysis was a practical proposition and now, with its help, we know much, much more about what is a “good” species and about those that are most closely related. But most of us are still, by and large, at sea with taxonomy and to answer the question posed I will take such a basic approach that I can even hear the Chinese screaming.

As gardeners we divide the genus *Rhododendron* into four main types. The best known are the bigger-leaved types often with hemispherical blooms. This is sub-genus *Hymenanthes*. Then there are the smaller-leaved plants with dots (scales) most often on the underside of the leaves. The presence of these



The strongly scented azalea *R. luteum*.

scales marks a basic division in the genus. The scaly ones are called *Lepidotes* and are in the sub-genus *Rhododendron*. Lepidote rhododendrons will not breed with lepidote rhododendrons. Next are the evergreen azaleas. These traditionally have been placed in the sub-genus *Tsutsutsi* (the Japanese name for an azalea). Lastly, gardeners recognize the deciduous azaleas, sub-genus *Pentanthera*.

The last name gives us a clue to a very broad generalization we can make about the difference between a rhododendron and an azalea. Azaleas, for the most part, have five anthers/stamens, and rhododendrons have ten or more. There are lots of exceptions, but if you are showing people around your garden and are asked the difference, pick a flower, assume a professorial mien, count the pollen-bearing parts, and pronounce. It's an impressive performance and very self-satisfying.

There are other differences such as azaleas having adpressed hairs on the top of their leaves and the way the petals are wrapped up in the flower buds. Further, there are a few other sub-genera with peculiarities like having no terminal flower. These subtleties are, however, best left for scholarly, and heated, debate at taxonomical conferences.


I should point out that the five-anther pronouncement may not stand up for very long. **Dr. Ben Hall** of the University of Washington is a world leader in the use of DNA in the classification of rhododendrons. His latest findings suggest sub-genus *Pentanthera* is difficult to justify and that most of what we call deciduous azaleas should be grouped with those in *Hymenanthes*. Obviously, we need more conferences. ↪



New Members

When the rhododendron-flowering season was at its peak this spring and even when the season had ended, along came a lot of new members. These newcomers give various reasons for joining, and more than a few were easily persuaded to do so by **Peter Lewis** . . . **Lynda Macovichuk**, who is from the Prairies originally, is fortunate indeed. When she and her husband bought their Cowichan River property 7 years ago, they also became the owners of a goodly number of mature rhodos planted 35–40 years ago by someone named **Miller**. They've added to the collection, and are now steadfast devotees of the genus . . . **Anu-Edith Eggenberger** is as enthusiastic a rhodo person as you'll find anywhere. When Anu moved to Cowichan Station from Fort Langley in 1999 she brought with her two rhodos that are now 30 years old and growing lovelier by the year. (One was badly damaged last winter but bounced back with new growth this spring.) She cannot grow azaleas, though; it's the deer, she says . . . For **Anne Connolly**, rhodos have a therapeutic value. An ardent landscaper, she injured her back moving boulders a while ago and now, after surgery and a long convalescence, has turned to rhodos to cheer her up—and the half-acre Mill Bay property . . . **Liz Leverington** has always been a keen gardener, constantly adding touches of colour at her Auchinachie home, but

claims she hasn't had much success with rhodos. In the year ahead, she hopes to learn the tricks of the game at our CVRS meetings . . . **Jeremy and Marie-Therese Evans** knew exactly what to do when they moved to The Properties nearly 10 years ago and confronted a hillside that was more grass than lawn. They turned the slope over to rhododendrons, adding to some already planted, and now have 70. Besides having excellent drainage, the plants need feeding only once a year, plus mulching and watering, of course. "They're easy," Jeremy says . . . With almost three-quarters of an acre for gardening on Arnhem, off Lakes Road, **Betsy Bakker** looks forward to getting into rhodos. She intends to work them in with hostas, which are her first love. Home gardening and her job dovetail. Betsy takes care of the garden centre at **Shar-Kare**. . . **Cynara de Goutiere** has been a rhodo collector for years, often choosing them, as many of us do, by colour, and planting them in what she and **Rob** call their "mayhem" garden. Her interest in rhodos waxes and wanes and now it's in revival mode. She looks forward to learning more about them . . . So does **Heather Barker**, who has a small garden, has always liked rhodos and gardening, and sees in CVRS membership as an opportunity to associate with like-minded people.

The CVRS welcomes you, one and all. 


Oregon Chapters Host Conference

The 27th Western Regional Rhododendron Conference, sponsored by three Oregon chapters in District 4 of the American Rhododendron Society, will be held September 21–23 at the Agate Beach Inn at Newport, Oregon, with the emphasis on information one can use in the garden. Co-chairmen are **Harold Greer** and **Mike Stewart**.

Speakers include **John Hammond** on "Gardens of Western Great Britain" and **Sally and John Perkins** on "Rhododendrons to Try, Grow, and Visit" as dinner speakers on Friday, September 21, and **Harold Greer** on "If I Were a Rhododendron" and **Steve Hootman** of the Species Foundation at Federal Way, Washington on "Rhododendron Species – the Best Selections

for Your Garden" as banquet speakers on Saturday, September 22. **Mike Bones** will be the breakfast speaker on Sunday, September 23, and there will be a panel discussion on climate and weather and their effect on our ability to grow plants. Clinics with the title "How To and More," led by expert growers, are scheduled throughout.

Registration is \$39 (U.S.) before September 5 and \$49 after that date. Non-ARS members are invited, all meals are optional, and registrants are reminded that there is no sales tax in Oregon.

More information can be obtained from the Eugene chapter Web site at www.eugene-chapter-ars.org or by phoning 1-800-548-0111 .

A Stunning Private Garden Revealed

by Leslie Drew

In the gathering darkness, we walk along a narrow roadway through a forest toward an opening where the sound of flowing water beckons, and suddenly come upon an illuminated garden seemingly like none other in this part of the world.

By the entrance, from a trough that began life as an ore bin, a restored hand pump discharges an artesian bounty of 75 gallons of water a minute onto two spillways that look as if they are made of aluminum, but are actually transparent tiles of polycarbonate resin. This is just one small piece of an elaborate and expansive water mosaic. The cool, humid atmosphere can now be discerned as emanating from a large pond, almost a small lake, where three ornamental fountains play—fountains that are much larger than they first appear to be. A stone walkway flanked by Pacific water iris leads over the pond to a central gazebo of metal and glass veiled by water cascading from the dome. Inside a wrought iron staircase winds up to a viewpoint. Access to the interior requires one of the umbrellas hanging on a crafted stand at the entrance.

Facing the pond on the left is a multi-storey studio surmounted by a circular tower bearing prayer flags. One of the ground-level walls can be parted wide enough to admit a truck, though the exterior design deftly conceals the opening. Further on stands the house with a façade that, like the studio, is both distinctive and quietly attractive. Between the two, set in a split driveway, is another high fountain, its waters contained in a round base that weighed eleven tons when set in position. Low, curving rock walls form a connecting ring here and into the distance, off where the garden reaches a meadow bordering the Koksilah River.

The limitless nature of the art of landscaping shows itself at every turn. Illusions abound. But what further distinguishes this garden is a thorough understanding of hydraulics and the transforming power of directed water, using in this instance both natural and man-made Iron Age to Space Age materials. Refreshingly, there are no draped maidens from ancient Greece,




nor is there anything specifically Oriental. The fountains are either free-form or geometric. In essence, this garden is a partnership's expression of a philosophical outlook—Toti, Peter Lewis's wife, is a Buddhist and a professional artist—so this is an intensely intimate and personal private garden. Instinctively, one feels that tour buses, let alone tourists, would violate the spirit of the place.

Peter is known in the CVRS as a conscientious recruiter of new members (one more came forward on this magical night), so it came as a bit of a surprise at the annual picnic that he should invite everyone to his garden the following night, at 9:30, dressed warmly, carrying an umbrella and a flashlight. Were we to catch weevils? Few of us knew what to expect. The impromptu tour turned out to be the first time the garden had been opened to a group of friends.

Toti is an internationally recognized artist, Canadian-born and trained in London, England, who was working at the time on three large acrylic paintings of Lance Armstrong's 2005 victory in the Tour de France bicycle race. Peter is best known in western Canada for the Great Divide Waterfall

he installed in 1981 at the historic High Level Bridge over the North Saskatchewan River at Edmonton where 11,000 gallons of water flow every minute through a series of nozzles to create a cascade higher than Niagara Falls. He also designed and built water features for Expo 86 in Vancouver.

The couple bought their 10 acres on the Koksilah River in 1985 and the following year began rebuilding a rancher to make their present home overlooking the pond, with help from Peter's father from England. Construction of the studio and garden followed. The waters, which come not from the Koksilah but from wells dowsed by Peter that tap into what appears to be a huge aquifer, are carried underground in two-inch pipes and flow back into the river. The major task was removal of tall Douglas-firs and other trees preparatory to excavation for the pond.

What does Peter call their garden—a water garden? "It's the yard with some of my things in it," he says, as though it has been child's play. Readily, he talks of more to come: a 100-foot waterfall tumbling from an escarpment behind the pond, and on the fringes, hundreds of rhododendrons reflecting in the still waters. Here still waters certainly run deep. 





September In The Rhododendron Garden


by *Liz Murray*

Ah, September. The days are shorter and the nights cooler, and the rhododendrons are doing their best to finish budding up for next year.


One inch per week to the roots of the plant is the amount of water a rhodo needs to thrive in the summer. In September, moisture comes from a variety of sources—morning dew, rain, and watering. Longer, cooler nights lessen the evaporation that takes place and, adding the dew factor, many people feel this is the time to reduce the watering and stress the plant somewhat, tricking it into thinking it's going to die and therefore needs to produce many flowers in order to reproduce, a bonus next spring for the gardener. We reduce water somewhat in September as some rhodos have established their buds and their leaves are well grown. Watch the weather to decide how much you should water, and remember that dry, windy days are as bad, if not worse, as the hot, sunny ones.

This is a good month for checking your rhodos for weeds, not just the garden area around them, but in them. A rhodo can hide a multitude of plants that

are feasting on the wonderful soil you have provided. The seeds of native trees seem to like rooting beneath the canopies of rhodos and blackberry vines seem to like their roots shaded. This is a good time to catch them before they become even better rooted.

Are you thinking about acquiring more rhododendrons? If so, think about joining the propagating group. You'll learn how to make cuttings and grow them on with a keen group of knowledgeable individuals and visit gardens for plant material that you will not find on the open market. Imagine growing your own plants from scratch. What are you waiting for? 

Ready Response

Our member **Rose Rogan**, an expert plant grower and operator of **Perennial Ridge Farms**, stepped up smartly when the **Cowichan Valley Association for Community Living** appealed for donations this spring. The group's **John Madden** gave **Ian Efford** a list of plants needed for landscaping its centre on Clements Street in Duncan and its four residential houses as well as its horticultural therapy program. When the emails circulated, Rose immediately gave 6 rhododendrons and 12 hostas. 

Gardeners Mourn Loss Of Bernhard Dinter

The Cowichan Valley lost its long-time premier nurseryman with the death of **Bernhard F. A. Dinter** on July 19. He was 92.

His expert advice to countless gardeners since the 1970s, when he started the **B. Dinter Nursery**, together with the quality of his stock, effectively accomplished his avowed goal of making the Valley more beautiful. He introduced many new plant varieties and would make every effort to obtain rare plants requested by customers. For many years, he would deliver and set specimen trees for customers as part of their purchase.

As the nursery grew into a major garden centre, with his son **Bernie** he continued a work pace that

would daunt younger men. In landscaping alone, they fulfilled nearly a thousand garden designs commissioned by clients during the last 15 years.

After distinguished service in the German army on the Russian Front in the Second World War, he apprenticed at one of Germany's leading tree nurseries, the **Müllerklein Nursery** at Karlstadt. Emigrating with his wife and young son, he came to this district in 1952 and for 20 years worked as a gardener at **Shawnigan Lake School** before striking out on his own.

He was an honorary member of the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society. 



Spring Events in Photos

A glorious bank of old rhododendrons is a stellar feature every June at the former garden of the **Stokers and Simpsons** at Marble Bay on Lake Cowichan. Now the property of the University of Victoria, the garden was opened to CVRS members this year at the invitation of custodian **Roger Wiles**, who spoke in the lab on the garden's seminal role in rhododendron growing here and the two couples who developed it in the 1900s—naturalists **Dr. Richard Stoker**, a retired colonel in the British army in India and his artist wife **Susan**, and **Suzanne and Buchanan Simpson**, their close friends and successors whose alpine plant nursery formed the base of the **Ted and Mary Greig** rhododendron nursery at Royston.



The photo above shows the height of old rhodos remaining after most of the original plantings were moved to the Finnerty Garden at UVic in the early 1970s. Most are more than 7 metres tall.

For years, **Roger** has been trying to identify a pink rhododendron bearing hundreds of blossoms every June and regarded as perhaps the finest in the high bank. It was identified this year by **Rhonda Rose**, Finnerty Garden supervisor, as *R. 'Jean'* (*griersonianum* × *decorum*), a Stirling Maxwell hybrid registered in 1936. **Evelyn Weesjes** first suggested *R. 'Jean'* last year, and **Rhonda Rose** was able to match sample blossom and leaves with a plant of Marble Bay provenance now 4 m tall in the Finnerty Garden (left). Later, it was learned that **Sandra and Trevor Evelyn** also have *R. 'Jean'* in their garden at Nanaimo.

Members and friends took advantage of every opportunity to visit gardens of other members and friends



in the April and May garden tours arranged by **Anne and Roger Slaby**. Among those touring the outstanding rhododendron garden of **Pentrelew** on Grieve Road, restored by **Mona Kaiser** and **Tom**

Rimmer over recent years, were **Sylvia and Glenn Dyer** (left) of Victoria, daughter and son-in-law of **Edna and Claude Green** who made the original garden.

A framed citation honouring the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society for gaining the most new members of all 70 chapters in the American Rhododendron Society is displayed by **Carrie Nelson**, at left, the membership co-chair, and **Ingeborg Woodsworth**, president. The award was delivered at the annual picnic by **Ken and Madeleine Webb** of the Victoria chapter, who received it on behalf of the Cowichan club at the ARS annual convention in San Francisco in April. The President paid tribute also to the work of previous membership chairs **Jackie Walker** and **Sharon Pettersson** and to current co-chair **Peter Lewis**. In July the tally was: 73 full members, 53 individual memberships, 1 life member, and 4 associate members. ↪





A Fraser Souvenir Is Doing Well

by **Bill Dale**

A rhododendron hybrid found years ago in the garden of **George Fraser**, the pioneer nurseryman of Ucluelet, has a new lease on life in the family garden of the nursery in Scotland where he worked as a young man.

In 1820, the first Christie started **Christie's Nursery** in Fochabers in northeastern Scotland, which continues to this day as an alpine and rare plant nursery. In 1871, George Fraser obtained work there and so began his life in horticulture.

In 1890, Fraser came to Victoria where he worked for **John Blair** in the building of Beacon Hill Park. Two years later, he went to Ucluelet and operated his ericaceous plant nursery until his death in 1944 in his 90th year.

In 2002, the **Fochabers Fiddlers**, the high school band from Fochabers, came to Victoria and gave several performances, playing at Beacon Hill Park and the University of Victoria. The featured Scottish dancer at both places was **Fiona Christie**, a descendant of the nursery family.


When I met her, I was able to give her a rooted cutting of *Rhododendron* 'Fiona Christie', the hybrid of unknown parentage that had been found in Fraser's old garden and brought to Victoria. I had obtained cuttings of the original plant, grew them on, and named and registered the plant with the **American Rhododendron Society**.



Fiona Christie with her namesake rhododendron

The cutting she took home is doing well, as the photo she sent me here shows, and this year was in full bloom for the first time

Fiona has finished high school and gone on to the University of Glasgow where she is studying medicine.


Last year, **Judy Gloster** of Duncan and her husband, **Dr. Owen Gloster**, visited the University of Glasgow where he had graduated in medicine. Judy went to Fochabers and was shown around the Christie nursery by Fiona's grandparents. 

Picnic Moves Indoors

Cold and rain don't have to get in the way of a successful picnic. CVRS members defied bad weather on June 9. The annual picnic was to have been held at the Gibbins Road home of **Siggi** and **Maria Kemmler**, who had their relatively new and very fine rhododendron garden looking its best. But after a cold, rainy Saturday dawned, before tents were to be set up, the picnic turned into an indoor party when **Ann Springford** offered her home across the valley above Bird's Eye Cove. Conveners **Hilda Gerrits** and **Susan O'Connor** began working through a long list of phone calls, **David** and **Janet Gardner** helped rearrange the seating in Ann's livingroom, and by noon the party started right on time.

A large bouquet of rhodo blossoms brought from their Sooke garden by **Johanna** and **Moe Massa** set the scene, and more than 30 members and guests engaged in lively conversation and lunched on an array of delectables ranging from **Janet Gardner's** beef bourgignon to **Bill Dumont's** mango cobbler.

The number of plants for the raffle was easily the largest ever at a CVRS picnic. Besides about 15 contributed by **Alan** and **Sandy Campbell**, there were nearly 30 brought from Victoria by **Ken** and **Madeleine Webb**, mostly rhodos but also hellebores and a few other plants.

The hostess, who had just celebrated her 80th birthday, seemed to enjoy the party as much as everyone else—and was profusely thanked for opening her home at almost the last minute. 



PROPAGATION

A Chip Off the Old Block

by Alan Campbell

September already! Rhododendron bloom time is melting down. 'Polar Bear' was deadheaded a month ago (I have always thought that an odd name for a summer-blooming rhodo), *R. auriculatum* and her progeny, such as 'Royston Peach' and 'Royston Reverie,' are now quite shabby in their appearance. What's a rhodoholic to do?

Taking a much needed respite from a summer project of fence-building, Sandy and I attended the annual mid-summer "Evening in the Garden" festivities at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden in Federal Way, Washington. Not much in the way of rhodo blooms to admire, though many other genera produced enough of a show to engender a wider scope of floral interest, not the least of which were the staff and fellow members of the Rhododendron Species Foundation (RSF).

The primary purpose of this event is to provide the opportunity to visit with like-minded people, growers of rhododendrons. For instance, to marvel at the exploits of plant collectors Steve Hootman and Garret Richardson who travel to the Golden Triangle of the species rhododendrons, returning with the seed or snippets of familiar rhodos to add a new accession to the repository of plants at the RSF. Perhaps even *species nova*, a new species altogether. A highlight to me is the chance to speak with Dennis Bottemiller, the man who takes possession of the varied plant material upon the hunters' return and through various means produces viable plants. Dennis willingly guided me through his "house of magic"—the processes and tricks of the trade he uses to grow plants on. The weekend was an experience more than enough to turn this not-so-young-man's mind to propagation.

The propagation of rhododendrons from cuttings is not an exact science. Various methods are used and I will mention differences as I go along. But first and foremost, with whatever method used, cleanliness is imperative, beginning with secateurs which have been dipped in a 10% bleach solution.

The standing general agreement is that the cuttings should be collected in the morning, preferably after a good watering. As a point of interest, did you know that a controlled irrigation system is less beneficial than rain? One point of argument is whether the cutting should be taken from a lower shaded branch or one growing proudly in the sun.

Clint Smith is a firm proponent of collecting cuttings early in the season, beginning in mid-July through mid-September. I know of others who don't start taking cuttings until late September through to December or even later. Timing can be critical. The cuttings must be semi-ripe. If taken too early the cutting will be too soft; taken too late and lignification will have begun and the cutting will have become too woody.

The cuttings should now be put in ziplock bags with some moisture added (just breathing into the bag is enough) to prevent desiccation or wilting.

On arrival at your propagation area they are trimmed to a length of three to four inches at the most. Obviously, a cutting of 'Courtenay King' with its new

growth of ten inches or more will need trimming whereas a cutting of 'Canada', which puts on an inch of new growth, will need no trimming.

Now trim the number of leaves to three or four. The remaining leaves must now be cut in half. Removing a percentage of leaf surface slows down the transpiration of moisture. At this

point, a conflict of opinion occurs. Some propagators insist that the cuttings must now be stuck into the rooting medium as quickly as possible, whereas other propagators store the cutting in the fridge for up to a month, claiming greater rooting success.

Most agree that the rooting medium should be a soilless mix made up of 50% peat and 50% perlite. Some propagators will increase the porosity of the mix by adding more perlite and (or) granite grit. No soil is added because of the possibility of contamination by pathogens. Going further, I know that Evelyn Weesjes uses a steam box to heat her soilless mix to ensure its sterility. Clean sand has also been used as a rooting medium.



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A Chip Off the Old Block . . .

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The rooting medium is placed four inches thick into a propagating box. I have seen this box range in size from a single one-gallon pot to a six foot wide by forty foot long table. The box can be on the ground or raised to any comfortable level. It can be solid-based or have a porous bottom; it can be insulated or not. The wet, not soggy, medium needs bottom heat. The most common type is a heat cable buried in a layer of sand. The purpose is to raise the rooting temperature to a higher degree than the leaf zone.


With the cuttings prepared and the propagating box of rooting medium ready, “sticking” is the next step. First, with a sharp knife, scar the bottom of the cutting on one or two sides into the cambium layer (about an inch long) and dip the scarred end into a rooting hormone. This hormone may be a liquid, a gel, or a powder as long as the

concentration of butyric acid is a maximum 0.8%. Stick the cutting into the rooting medium to half its length,

The next to last step promotes rooting. Place the “stuck” cuttings into an atmosphere of 100% humidity. This can be as simple as placing a plastic bag over that one-gallon pot to an elaborate greenhouse with the long table. Ensure that the rooting medium never dries out.

The last step in propagating is patience. Some varieties of rhododendrons will root within a month; others may take up to six months or even longer.

Should you need more information look at Marc Columbel's Web site at the Societe Bretonne de Rhododendron <http://perso.orange.fr/s.b.r./indexgb.htm> Marc's study session page gives good direction.

You are also welcome to join our propagating group. We meet the second Tuesday of the month at 7:30 PM at various members' homes to see and discuss the various methods we use. 

Total Ban 'Inappropriate'

The Royal Horticultural Society has advised the Scottish Executive, the governing arm of Scotland's Parliament, not to be too sweeping in its proposals to curb the spread of non-native plants in the wild by officially classifying some well-known garden plants as “invasive” and even banning them from sale in Scotland.


Current legislation under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* making it an offence to cause certain non-native plant species to grow in the wild in Scotland could be expanded, but an RHS spokesman says of greater concern to gardeners are amendments made under the *Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act* of 2004 giving Scottish ministers the power to make it illegal to sell hybrids of listed species including *Rhododendron ponticum* and *Gaultheria shallon*, our native salal.

With *R. ponticum*, the situation is complex because the plant growing wild in Britain usually called *R. ponticum* in most cases seems to be *R. ponticum* subsp. *baeticum*, from the Iberian Peninsula, or its hybrids, *The Garden*, journal of the RHS, reports in its May issue.

“To be effective, any listing would have to include *R. ponticum* and selections made from the species,” Tony Dickerson, RHS Horticultural Advisor, is quoted as saying. “But the Society believes a blanket listing of *R. ponticum* hybrids is inappropriate.”

Rhododendron ponticum was important in developing hardy rhodo hybrids and there are nearly 200 cultivars with *R. ponticum* parentage, the Journal continues. Unless they are specifically excluded, the order would mean that all of

these, most of which have no evidence of being invasive, would be banned from sale in Scotland.


In the case of *Gaultheria shallon*, the problems that it causes in the wild probably have more to do with its being planted as cover for game birds than use in gardens. The RHS contends any prohibition should include only the species because again there seems no evidence that the hybrids are invasive. 

Container Soil Mix

A formula of a soil mixture for successful container-growing of rhododendrons was recommended by Alan Campbell at the May monthly meeting of the CVRS.

The mix most growers use for plants grown in the ground—one-third bark mulch or wood chips, one-third compost, and one-third sand—doesn't work for containers, he said; it needs aggregate as well. To the bark-compost-sand mixture should be added one-fourth lava rock chips or pumice and (or) turkey grit or shale. Shale should also be used as a mulch to prevent hardening of the surface.

With this mixture, there is no need to change the soil; the plant needs only water and liquid fertilizer. To illustrate, he showed a bonsai *R. litangense* in flower that was much improved since being repotted in the amended mixture.

His formula is based on principles in the text *Soil Science and Management* by Edward Plaster who has a Master's degree in agriculture education from the University of Minnesota. 



A Great Double-Header

by Peter Lewis

The World Rhododendron Council, if such a thing exists, should make it mandatory for all rhododendron lovers to make an annual pilgrimage to the Gibson Masterpiece Garden in Tofino coupled with George Fraser Day and the Heritage Fair in Ucluelet. It makes a great double-header.

I positioned that thought like a halo over Etta Cook's head at her garden tour and gently whispered that I was going to Ucluelet and that the trip was on me. We left the next morning at 7:30 along with Etta's daughter Ruth and arrived at 11:30. A quick inquiry at the grocery store led us to George Fraser's house. We were right on the track as members of the pipe band in full regalia clashed with the tree-size rhodos in front and back yards.

George Fraser settled in Ucluelet and ran a nursery there after arriving in Victoria before the turn of the 20th Century. He was a great plantsman and the first on Vancouver Island to hybridize rhodos.

As we drove further, we saw a crowd of people entering a local hall. A voice yelled at Etta. It was Terry



The Lieutenant-Governor with Peter Lewis

Richmond from Port Alberni. After a few pleasantries, he delved into the pros and cons of magnesium sulphate as a supplement for rhodos. Once in the hall, our CVRS gals were mobbed like celebrities. Etta got a signed copy of the book, *George Fraser*, by Bill Dale, who was present. The Lieutenant-Governor Iona Campagnolo remarked that I must be their chauffeur—wild, wicked, and Welsh (on my T-shirt). I told her that I had seen her namesake at Norm Todd's nursery in Saanich and that everyone thought she was beautiful. We left quite abruptly, as celebrities do, a quick goodbye to Ken and Dot Gibson and told them that we would stop by on our way home. One hour later, we were lost in the sea of colour on Mount Gibson. 'Point Defiance'

was at its best along with 'Lem's Cameo' and on and on. I must be the biggest customer of his postcards.

A week later our son, who lives in California, took his honeymoon in Tofino and surrounds. The first thing he remarked on his return was, "Dad, you should check out the rhododendrons growing on the side of the road to Ucluelet." Next time, we shall.

In the meantime—Thanks, George! ↪

Plant Seed Stolen

A thief of rare and protected native plants is on the loose. From Genevieve Singleton, warden of the Honeymoon Bay Ecological Reserve, came word early this summer that Syd Watts, warden of the Mount Tzuhalem Ecological Reserve, found that someone had stolen seed heads from the few *Balsamoriza deltoidea* (red-listed as "endangered") plants in the reserve. This also happened last year: "We are asking everyone to keep an eye out for these being sold somewhere," Genevieve emailed CVRS President Ingeborg Woodsworth who belongs to the Native Plant Society of British Columbia. Anyone with information can email Genevieve at twinflower@telus.net. In Victoria, Agnes Lynn said this is not a new problem. Last year, seeds of *Lomatium dissectum* and *Triteleia howellii* were stolen from Beacon Hill Park. ↪

Correction ↪ ↪ ↪

Apologies to Peter Lewis. In the May issue of the CVRS Newsletter ("A Great Day for Bus Trippers" by Peter Lewis), a much-admired new hybrid at Norman Todd's Firwood Nursery was wrongly identified as *Rhododendron* 'Iona Cee'. The correct name is *R. 'Iona Campagnolo'*. It turns out that British Columbia's Lieutenant-Governor has not one but two rhododendrons named for her. *R. 'Iona Cee'* ('Haida Gold' × 'Golden Star') is Courtenay nurseryman Harry Wright's creation. *R. 'Iona Campagnolo'* ('Etta Burrows' × ('Anna' × 'Fusilier')) was grown from Royal Horticultural Society seed in 1981 by Jean Round of the Vancouver chapter and raised at Alouette Nursery in the Fraser Valley. It was presented to the Lieutenant-Governor as a gift when she opened the ARS convention in Victoria two years ago, and has now been registered. The original plant is in Garth Wedemire's garden. — The Editor ↪



EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

Deadheading Made Easy

by Leslie Drew

As the garden ages and the gardeners along with it, one cannot help but become thoroughly adept at some task or other. Mulching, for instance, or potting up. I like to think that I've become an expert at deadheading.

Norman Todd is quite right—it takes a deadhead to deadhead and if you're not one to start with, the tedium will turn you into one. So I try to think of all the mundane matters of day-to-day life that I haven't had time to think about lately. Now and then, rather than stay in the mindless mode, I actually think about what I'm doing, and only this spring, after years of removing spent rhododendron blossoms, did this slow learner observe that, at least with some plants, it's best to wait a while after the petals have fallen before Off with their Heads. 'Point Defiance', Halfdan Lem's gorgeous hybrid, is a case in point. Deadhead too early and the seed clusters resist the twist and the basal buds that ought to remain come off at the same time. Most of us with big plants don't let this bother us because we can afford to lightly prune while deadheading.

All this is fine in theory. In practice in a big garden many rhodos don't get deadheaded before autumn by which time they've developed clunking great seed pods that must have cost the plant a lot of energy. (Everything is translated into terms of energy these days.) Or they can't be reached.

So, it's a good idea to invite friends to stay at deadheading time. They always want to help in the garden, and after a quick demonstration, including dropping the castoffs under the plant for mulch, which somehow comes as a surprise, they're off and at it.

Yes, it's really quite easy to become a pro at deadheading.



Cold, wet weather went on so long this spring that anyone planting rhododendrons bought in April and May and even into June must have escaped the old problem of losing them because they didn't break out of their rootballs before the heat of summer.

Actually, autumn is the best time for planting, after the first rains since spring, when the ground is still warm and the roots can develop without other demands on the plant. Oddly, though, except in its very early days, the CVRS hasn't held an autumn plant sale. The reason? Many people like to see what they're buying—in bloom or at least in bud. Nonetheless, if you know what you want and can expect, fall is the time to buy and plant.

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