



# NEWSLETTER

Volume 18, Number 5

EDITOR: LESLIE DREW

May 2007


## Rhodo Sale of the Year



*This cascade of rhododendron blooms was part of last spring's annual plant sale. On May 5 members will again bring their best blossoms, as well as spare plants for the CVRS table. [Photo courtesy of Mhairi Bruce]*

**F**inal preparations are being made for the club's big fundraiser of the year, the annual plant sale Saturday May 5 in the Rabbit Barn at the Exhibition Grounds from 10 AM to 2 PM.

Top-quality rhododendrons and companion plants from nurseries all over southern Vancouver Island will go on sale. Vendors include Cherry Point Rhododendrons, Firwood Nursery, Peter Kearns, Mayo Creek Gardens, Perennial Ridge Farms, and Prospect Nursery, with Alba Plants and Keith Muir offering companion plants.

The club will have planting information and will be selling plants donated by members as well as standard guide books, new note cards depicting rhododendron hybrids originating in the Cowichan Valley, and raffle tickets for garden supplies donated by local businesses. 

## What's Coming Up

**May Meeting:** May 2 in St. John's Anglican Church Hall, 486 Jubilee Street, Duncan. Set-up at 7 PM, meeting starts 7:30.

**Speaker:** Garth Wedemire, past president of the Fraser Valley chapter, will be speaking on the Rhododendron Species Foundation and Species Study Days. As a plant hunter on trips to China and Nepal, he is much in demand as a speaker; as a computer expert, he has led development of the District 1 Web site. and in work for the ARS he is district director for chapters at large which are global in scope.

**Tea and Goodies:** Peter Kearns\* (746-5782); John and Mary Hardy (701-0447); Judeen Hendrickson (748-8856).

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

**Annual Spring Sale:** May 5 from 10 AM to 2 PM in the Rabbit Barn at the Exhibition Grounds.

**Propagating Group Meeting:** May 8 at 7:30 PM at the home of Ingeborg Woodworth, McLean Road, off Mayo Road, off Old Cowichan Lake Road. Carpool if possible.

**Directors' Meeting:** May 9 at 7:30 PM at the home of Leslie Drew, 4491 Creighton Road, Sahtlam. Carpool if possible.

**Garden Tours:** May 10, 6-8 PM, the garden of Janet and David Gardner, 1228 Margaret Place; May 15, 5:30-7:30 PM, the garden of Margaret deWeese, 1100 Genoa Bay Road; May 23, 5:30-8:00 PM, the garden of Etta and Ruth Cook, 3996 Riverside Road.

**George Fraser Day and Heritage Fair:** May 26 in Ucluelet. See story on Page 2.

**Special Viewing:** June 6 at noon at the University of Victoria's property at Marble Bay, Cowichan Lake, the historic garden of the Stokers and Simpsons. UVic's Field Resource Centre is located at the very (gravel) end of Marble Bay Road, which is off Meades Creek Road on the lake's north shore. The custodian, Roger Wiles, will be the guide. Bring brown bag lunch. Carpool if possible.

**Annual Picnic:** June 9 potluck at noon at the garden of Soggi and Maria Kemmler, Gibbins Road.

*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

**M**ay greetings to you all! No complaints from me about the weather as I write in mid-April. It's just the right gardening weather, a bit of sun and a touch of rain.

Believing that a rainy day would call for an indulgence (rain had been forecast), I took the day off on April 14 for our bus tour and was pleasantly surprised by the weather and had a most enjoyable experience. **Bill Dumont** arranged a fabulous day for us. I can hardly wait for the next tour.

It's not all hard work for us at this time of year. First, the plant sale: Please do help in whatever capacity, and don't forget to pot up some plant material for our club plant sales table. Next come more rewards: The Marble Bay heritage garden visit on June 6, a Wednesday, at noon (bring your own

brown-bag lunch, tea and coffee will be on hand); and then, our annual picnic June 9, Saturday, again at noon, at the home of **Siggi and Maria Kemmler**. This is potluck, so bring a dish and your cutlery, a plate, and glass.

Who is going to help **Hilda Gerrits** and me with co-ordinating this picnic? It means phoning mostly, a good way for you new members to get to know people. Two more members to assist would make it easy for all of us.

My previous appeal, for a membership chair, was wonderfully answered by **Carrie Nelson** and **Peter Lewis**. It's an immediate response such as this that makes it a pleasure to belong to our chapter these days. *by Ingeborg Woodsworth*

## George Fraser Festivity

**I**nvitations have been sent to all Vancouver Island Rhododendron chapters for the seventh annual **George Fraser Day and Heritage Fair** at Ucluelet on May 26, which promises an entertaining program for visitors and hometown folks alike

Events in recognition of the pioneer plantsman start at 10:30 AM at George Fraser Memorial Park with a welcome and introductions, a speech by **Lieutenant-Governor Iona Campagnolo** on "Heritage in Small Coastal Communities," Scottish fiddle and pipe playing, Highland and Aboriginal dancing, and a garden planting of Fraser hybrids by the Lieutenant-Governor, children, and others of the community.

An interpretive walking tour takes place from 11:30 to 12:30, beginning on Fraser Lane, to view heritage gardens where Fraser lived and worked, with a quick stop en route for a Uniquely Ukee greeting at the Village Square shops.

The Heritage Fair starts from 12:30 to 1 PM in the UAC Hall at 1510 Peninsula Road with speeches and presentations to the Lieutenant-Governor. Doors open at 12 noon, admission \$2, with lunch and refreshments available.

The Fair continues until 4 PM and features the launch of a new book by **Bill Dale** titled *George Fraser's Rhododendrons*, a silent auction, a plant sale, historical displays, jigs and reels played on George Fraser's fiddle, and other Scottish music and poetry readings.

Later, the Ucluelet Army Navy and Air Force Unit No. 293 is host at a seafood dinner and buffet at the ANAF Veterans Club, 1708 Peninsula Road, as a fundraiser for that group. Time is 7:30 PM with doors open at 5 and limited tickets available at \$20. Those wanting reserved tickets have been asked to reply by May 11 to the George Fraser event co-ordinator **Wanda McAvoy**.

For more information on the full program, contact Wanda via email at [gfraserproject@hotmail.com](mailto:gfraserproject@hotmail.com), phone 250-726-7459, or fax 250-726-7449.

## Summer Break

The *CVRS Newsletter* is on holiday until September. The next issue will be published the week before the next monthly meeting to be held September 5, 2007 in St. John's Anglican Church Hall, 486 Jubilee Street, Duncan.



## THE QUESTION BOX

### Good Companions

by Norman Todd

**Q** I live in deer country. Is there anything I can plant that will give some variety of flower and foliage?

**A** This is a common but perplexing question. The most effective way to solve the deer problem is to build a high fence. The late Peter Stone, one of the most notable of CVRS members, had a wise saying—the deer would eat anything they can't reach. It's not nearly as hopeless as Peter claimed, but he was speaking from experience.

We have several regiments of deer at our place and I can tell you of some companions that have been good for us.


To start the year off, I find the hellebores most satisfying. There are many new varieties appearing on the market these days, but don't dismiss the three or four most commonly available. The stinking hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*) is a great performer and has never offended my nose. If you crush the stems—a more common event than might be supposed as flower arrangers love the green blossoms available from December through April—it might give you a faint reminder of a cat's litter box. Its bigger cousin, also with green flowers (*Helleborus argutifolius*), is bold and textural and totally deer proof. *Helleborus orientalis* and its hybrids have blooms for "only" three months of the year, but come in colours from nearly black through pink and yellow to white. A good rule is to buy hellebores only when they are in bloom as the flowers are so variable. New strains with double and picotee flowers are now quite readily available.

All of the *Narcissi* are great buddies for rhododendrons. I particularly like the smaller early blooming varieties. A planting of February and

March blooming rhodos with some dark-flowered hellebores and dwarf daffodils is a simple, but artistically satisfying scene.

The *Epimediums* are not great fodder for our four-footed grazers. I have had the odd blossom spike savoured. Knowing a plant is poisonous is not instinctive to a deer—it has to learn the hard way. So I gladly write off the cost of their education. The plant growers and developers have again been busy in giving us gardeners more varietal choice. Some of the newer ones have a deep red foliage that complements well the lighter cleaner greens.

Among my ratings for the 10 best garden plants where there is a resident deer population I put the English Primrose right up there. (However, the best expression of native *Primula vulgaris* I ever saw was in Scotland. The plants covered a complete hillside in 20–25 cm clumps spaced with mathematical precision 20–25 cm apart—a phenomenon still without explanation.) Blooming from January to May, they certainly pay for their lodgings. They are easily divided and multiplied so Scottish gardeners consider them a good investment. The *Primula* genus is huge and some of the rarer alpine and Asiatic ones are very demanding of their environment and need coddling, but there are other primulas that are good companions. I will just mention a strain of *Primula* × *polyanthus* called the "Cowichan Strain." In my garden, I have only "Cowichan Blue," but there are others. No doubt someone in the club knows about these and their development and provenance. This would make a most interesting article for the Newsletter.

The Good Companions mentioned so far have been winter/spring blooming. It is a little harder to name summer-blooming pals for rhododendrons. Some gardeners find begonias escape predation, others claim dahlias survive. I have had spotty results with these two. Again, local knowledge is the very best guide. Please write to the Editor and relate any successes you have found. Sometimes the results of adversity can be sweet indeed. 



## More Garden Tours in May

The garden tours for CVRS members, which opened in April at Pentrelew and the garden of **Mona Kaiser** and **Tom Rimmer**, continues in May with three invitations. The garden of **Janet and David Gardner** is open at 1228 Margaret Place on May 10 from 6 to 8 PM, the garden

of **Margaret deWeese** at 1100 Genoa Bay Road on May 15 from 5:30 to 7:30 PM, and the garden of **Etta and Ruth Cook** at 3996 Riverside Road on May 23 from 5:30 to 8 PM. Here is what their owners have to say about their creations. ↪

## Views from a Gazebo

*by Janet and David Gardner*

The Gardeners' Garden was started in 1991. We had little knowledge of the broad range of plant material that would actually survive over a winter. The learning curve was steep. Our goal in the back garden was to develop a feeling of peace and restfulness. Developing a garden on shale has made this goal a challenge. Good drainage is important, but this is ridiculous.

One of our favourite areas has a small threadleaf maple at the front of a mixed bed of rhododendrons and companion plants. Several of the chairs in the gazebo swivel so you can view the garden from all aspects. Depending on what is blooming at the moment, what is happening in the pond, or in the shade garden, you can take it all in.

In the early spring, we both await the shower of blooms from *R. 'Blaney's Blue'*. The colour shimmers in the spring light. Another favourite is *R. 'Potlatch'* with its big dark pink trusses. The path takes you around behind the ponds and down to the dry garden. This hot spot is home to a beautiful Moroccan broom that has panicles of flowers scented like pineapple.

The front yard has been left to fend for itself. We deliberately decided we would not water anything beyond the small, enclosed front area. The grass goes brown in the summer and no



*Down the garden path into the secret garden*

plantings are watered. It is surprising how many plants can handle these harsh conditions.

Come and stroll through our garden. Sit in the gazebo and enjoy the views from all directions, have a cup of tea, and relax. ↪

## Craigsend

**C**raigsend, the garden of **Ruth and Etta Cook**, is a mature garden, started in 1978, covering about five acres, mostly rhododendrons and azaleas, many of which are species.

There are several fish ponds and a swamp garden.

It is not a show garden, very rustic, built for the enjoyment of the family. ↪



## Native Plants Lend Enchantment

by Margaret deWeese

The property which I am most fortunate to have the care of for my lifetime, is beautiful in its own natural state.

Right now, as I write, hundreds of pink *Calypso bulbosa* are poking their little ladies slippers through the moss in the forest. I have planted some Japanese maples, dogwoods, stewartias, and rhododendrons amidst the Douglas-fir and understory salal. Along the paths, *Cyclamen coum* lead one onward to the meadow, a piece of cleared land for an emergency BC Hydro easement line that runs the length of two sides of the land. There, sowed wildflowers spring up in the lazy days of summer, to be seen against the spectacular view of Maple Mountain.

Following the woodland paths down to the spring-fed pond is my favourite vantage point as all the elements of the garden are in sight—the bog, the pond, and the rock garden. The natural pond was the first place I started with the garden. I ringed it with trees (magnolias, a *Davidia involucrata*, a *Sophora japonicum*, maples, and rhododendrons), filled it with water lilies, and began work on the structures: a dock, two bridges to the small island, a gazebo, and two more bridges.

Across the pond, a little bulldozer levelled a hill smothered in blackberries where a marvelous erratic rock was unearthed. This has become the resting place of a Buddha whose knees are now covered in moss. The dominant tree is the *Metasequoia glystroboides* growing toward the sky. Rhododendrons grow or die in this wet



*R. 'Harry Carter'* with pond in background

area; there have been significant losses over the years. The dominant plant on the far side is *Equisetum arvense* (horsetail) and to augment their beauty, trees of the *Taxodium* genus have been planted—*Taxodium ascendens*, which grows to 40 feet and looks like giant horsetails, is well suited to dinosaur-minded grandchildren. Of course, by a boggy pond there are many spiny clumps of gunnera, which look great in the summer as the dragonflies and frogs use them for landing perches. Oh, and the vision of Monet's water lilies has been curtailed by voracious muskrat families!

I live at Maple Bay, at the beginning of the Genoa Bay Road, 250 metres from the corner, on the left-hand side. There is a garden out front that used to be the old road bed. It amazes me, as it is the only part of the garden to endure hot sun, little water, and gravel road fill, yet it does quite well. I look forward to welcoming you to "Shibui." ↪

### PROPAGATION

## Tips on Cuttings

by Siggi Kemmler

At the Propagation Group's last meeting, propagating from cuttings was again discussed. Roger Slaby had gleaned an article from the November 1, 1981 issue of *American Nurseryman* that traces the history of this type of propagation. It is very instructive, giving good information, but also shows how practices change with time.

Roger also told us a few things to remember: take cuttings only from new growth generated after

pinching; after potting the rooted plants, they need a period of chilling to break buds; and there should be a temperature difference between growing medium and air—the air could be as much as 20°F colder.

A sprig of a Gibraltar azalea, which had broken under a snow load and had lain on the ground for days before I noticed it, I stuck into the propagating box. It is now sprouting some green alongside one of the buds. I wonder if it is rooting.

On March 16, I seeded nine species. On the first of April, *R. calophytum* appeared, followed on April 8th by *R. thomsonii*, and then on April 13th, *R. principis* made a move. Exciting! ↪



## May In The Rhododendron Garden

by Liz Murray

**G**ardeners who are in shape are ready for the wonderful month of May in the garden. This is the month many rhododendrons return all the care given them by providing us with their glorious bloom and it is also the month for getting them in the best possible shape.

**Cleaning up frost damage** – Many of us have discovered that the early April frosts destroyed some of the emerging buds on our rhododendrons. These buds will not fully open and may remain partially closed and unsightly. If you haven't done so, go ahead and deadhead the damaged buds. It will improve the look of any of the good buds as they flower and improve the look of the plant generally.

**Deadheading** – There is always controversy about deadheading. Deadheading is usually done after the plant has finished its floral display or the flowers are fading. Grasp the flower head where the stem holding the truss begins. You will notice tiny buds at the base. Snap the flower head off, being careful to keep the new buds intact. If you accidentally break off a bud, don't despair—rhododendrons have great growth powers. Why should you deadhead? Rhododendrons bloom to reproduce, not to please the gardener. Each truss has the potential to produce many seeds. If the heads are left on the plant, the plant is obliged to ripen the seed capsules and expend energy on seed production as opposed to next year's crop of blossoms. I have noticed that if we miss the odd head, often the plant doesn't produce flower buds on that branch.

Deadheading gives you time to check a plant well, decide whether its shape is good, check its health, and

notice whether it has produced layers. Start at the bottom and work to the top. Some people like to take away the blooms to compost, but as long as the plant is healthy we drop the heads right underneath to add to our mulch. A deadheaded plant will look neat and clean. The bonus for me is that other plants around it look better.

Yuk! Although some of the deadheads come off neatly, others are extremely sticky. Last year, I discovered that some soft soap (e.g., Soft Soap Naturals with Aloe Vera by Colgate Palmolive) pumped onto my fingers, rubbed in, and then wiped off with a dry cloth, removed the stickiness quite well.

**Bud pruning** – This is often done on small plants to keep them bushy and compact. When the new buds begin to emerge, you can see whether there is one or more buds. On branches where only one bud emerges, snap that bud off and the plant will very often produce multiple buds. This will slow growth and produce a more balanced plant. It takes a lot of courage to do this on a small plant, but is a rewarding form of pruning and can be done simply on a walk around the garden as only your fingers are needed for this pruning.

**Pruning** – After blooming is a good time to remove branches or reduce the size of rhododendrons. The pruned branches will not likely bloom next year. Reducing the plant over a period of three or so years will maintain blooms and not shock the plant too much.

*A gardener is the spirit of the garden, the organizing force, the heart and soul of it all.*

☞ Jeff Cox

### BOOK REVIEW

## An Excellent Work

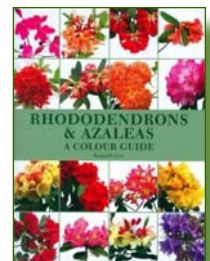
by Janet Gardner

**T**he recently published *Rhododendrons and Azaleas: A Colour Guide* by **Kenneth Cox** is the newest addition to our club library. What a treat it is to read!

The first part covers the history of rhododendrons, how they were collected, and their cultivation. This is presented in such a personable way you feel as though you are visiting with an old friend. He also gives excellent information on a variety of topics such as pests, landscaping, diseases, propagation, and collecting rhododendrons.

The major section of this book is devoted to a comprehensive encyclopedia of rhododendrons, azaleas, and vireyas. He not only talks about plant performance in his own gardens in Scotland, but also includes information relating to plant needs and performance in North America, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Europe.

There are more than 1200 pictures to illustrate more than 1000 plant portraits. This excellent work is an important addition to our library, and many people will undoubtedly want to secure their own copy. ☞





## A Great Day for Bus Trippers

by Peter Lewis

The excitement of anticipation was everywhere at 8:10 on a sunny Saturday morning (April 13), as 32 club members left Duncan on a comfortable chartered bus for a trip to three Saanich Peninsula nurseries.

We arrived at Russell Nursery on Wain Road in North Saanich at 9:30. Our host, **Brian Russell**, gave us a nice chat about his prize plant material. He is particularly fond of *Helleborus × hybridus* which, to a bird lover like myself, was interesting because its colour resembles that of the American goldfinch. Watching over us were Samuel Beckett's three nude lifesize sisters of hollowed concrete, clad only in brimmed garden hats. And boy, did we buy! **Bill Dumont** topped the ladder with **Roger Slaby** on the bottom rung.

All aboard to Brentwood Bay where **Robin** and **Betsy Dening** of Brentwood Bay Nurseries sold the last pair of *R. 'Starry Nights'* to eager buyers. We then rambled next door to the Church and State Winery where a tasting of the pinot noir and chardonnay was followed by a delicious box lunch provided for us by Ryders Coffee Shop in Mill Bay, all in the surrounds of terrazzo floors and superb vistas of the vineyard.

Back at the coach our guide, Bill Dumont, reminded me of a Greyhound bus driver—safe, reliable, and courteous. In a short time, we found ourselves at **Norman Todd's** Firwood Nursery near Elk Lake. His love for plants is reflected everywhere. I felt I was circumrambulating Mount Arunachala in India. To Norm's regret,



*Norman Todd, left, has all the answers*  
[Photo courtesy of **Siggi Kemmler**]

though, he lost 15% of his plant material to winter storms.

I saw in this garden a *belle de jour*. Her name is *R. 'Iona Cee'*\* and wow, was she ever radiant! **Hilda Gerrits** fell in love with her, along with most of us. A plant angel, **Sharon Tillie**, found my coveted 'Lem's Tangerine', and soon it was back to the bus, now overflowing with plants and their overprotective parents including **Marie Jacques** with her beautiful camellia, *Jury's Yellow*. We arrived safely back in Duncan at 4:30.

For next year I would like to propose a three-day coach trip to Greer's wonderful nursery in Oregon. Meanwhile, hats off to our CVRS! ↪

\* For background on *R. 'Iona Cee'* see "A New Island Hybrid" in the December 2006 issue of the *CVRS Newsletter*.



EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

We've a Part to Play

by Leslie Drew

Can any of us who has been on this planet a few years remember when any threat of disaster has come at us so hard—and so fast—as global warming?

The declaration of war against greenhouse gas emissions, issued not by our timid governments but by scientific consensus, requires that each of us do as much as we can to stop the destruction of our biosphere. In the foreword to the Canadian edition of his new book, Heat, the best-selling British writer George Monbiot points out that we Canadians emit an annual average of 19.5 tonnes of carbon dioxide per person, only 50 kilos fewer than the Australians and a tonne less than the Americans, whereas in the United Kingdom people produce an annual average of 9.5 tonnes, Germany 10.2 tonnes, and France 6.8. (The worst record is held by Gibraltar, "that preposterous redoubt of British empire" as he calls it, which generates 146.6 tonnes a year because of its tiny population's dependence on shipping and tourism.) The sustainable limit per capita is 1.2 tonnes, according to his calculations.

So what can we do, individually and as members of an organization dedicated to plants and beauty? Quite a lot. For one thing those of us who live outside urban cores can take fewer trips into town each week. We may spend longer there working our way down checklists, but we've saved some driving time as well as auto fuel.

And as rhododendron club members, we can carpool for meetings and garden tours. Some of us who take pride in being economical do that already, and have done so for years. En route we talk about rhodos, catch up on each other's gardening news, and enjoy the company.

There are other ways we as gardeners can help to reduce our impact on the biosphere. I hope to explore a few of the options in coming issues, and welcome your ideas. ↪

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