

The Yak

Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society

Volume 15 Number 9 November 2002



Fraser South Rhododendron Society
is a chapter of the
American Rhododendron Society

Meetings are held at 7:30 pm on the
third Wednesday of each month at:
United Church Hall
5673 - 200th Street
Langley BC

2002 Officers

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This Month's Meeting: Wednesday, November 20

Topic: "From Chilliwack Mountain to China"

Speaker: Paige Woodward

Paige Woodward is a co-owner of the family-run
Pacific Rim Native Plant Nursery, located on the
top of Chilliwack Mountain

Companion Plants: Colleen Forster

Show & Tell: Vern Finley

Plant Sale: Sue Klapwijk, with some hard to find
species and hybrids.

Quick Hits



CHRISTMAS PARTY The December meeting, on
Wednesday, December 18, will be another great
potluck dinner. We will meet at the usual place,
but at an earlier time: 6:00 pm. Everyone attending the Christmas
Party is asked to participate in our gift exchange - bring a gift valued
at around \$10.00 and chose a gift for yourself.



LIBRARY NEWS We have run out of shelf room in
our library cabinet and we have a surplus of books,
some of which have not been borrowed for many
years and others that have been donated. The Executive has decided
to offer these books to members via the Twoonie table over the
next few months. Look for these treasures starting at the November
meeting.
Also, a selection of Harold Johnson's books will be on our Library
shelves in November.



From the President

Many of our Chapter members participated in a study by Agriculture Canada to determine whether there was any sign of infestation by the fungus responsible for sudden oak death: "phytophthora ramorum". The coordinator has advised me that no evidence of any contamination by this deadly fungus was found among any of the numerous samples examined.

The Trethewey House Historical Society in Abbotsford exists to promote and record items of historical local interest. One of the coordinators has indicated a desire to landscape the area with particular reference to the McKee rhodos, and efforts are in hand at present to assist with this project. Long-time members will recall that the Chapter was involved in identifying and propagating many of these plants of historical interest, and many of the cuttings are now doing well in various members' gardens. Details regarding this project can be found in the booklet *The First Ten Years* authored by Mike Trembath.

Joan Bengough, our hard working librarian, advised our executive at the last meeting that there are a number of books donated by the Johnson family to the Chapter which are surplus to the library's requirements. These books will be made available to members through the monthly meetings, either as a contribution to the raffle or to the "Twoonie Table"

Apologies for the late delivery of copies of the document *Fraser South Rhododendron Society, The First Ten Years*. Authored by our own Mike Trembath, it is a great read of our early history and should be available at the November meeting.

The ARS has announced their intention to increase the annual dues in the year 2004. This will clearly have serious implications for recruitment. The ARS executive have advised that there has been no increase in dues during the past eight years and despite the award of several grants the society has run into a significant deficit during the past few years. It is anticipated that an increase of approximately \$7.00 would defer a further increase for another four or five years. Clearly no one is in favor of any fee increase, but expenses continue to rise. If you should have any thoughts or suggestions please convey them to Mike Bale or one of the other executive members, and this matter will be subject to discussion at the next Executive meeting.

Once again, a special "Thank You" to Wendy Sellars for managing the refreshments at the last minute for the October meeting. We all owe Wendy a great deal of thanks for the many activities that she does on our behalf.

PLEASE SUPPORT:

1. the Raffle Table and bring contributions - plants, booze or home-made baking
2. the "Twoonie Table" - any surplus plants appreciated

Remember: "Your excesses may be someone else's treasures."

Mike Bayle



From the Editor

This will be, I am afraid, a learning experience, and one that may be almost as painful for you as for me. I am sure to get people's names wrong, mix up the plant names and generally wreak havoc and confusion for the next little while. And, although I don't like to contradict Our Fearless Leader - I may be enthusiastic, but I am a long way from knowledgeable.

On the other hand - this could be fun.

Of course what I really need is material. There are the Chapter stalwarts who continue to provide wonderful material, but it would be really nice if everyone wrote an occasional note. Just something you wanted to share about your garden, or someone else's garden, or some nifty propagating trick handed down to you from your great aunt Sally, who could grow sunflowers on the north side of a mountain and strike cuttings that made others swoon.

But even more than material, what we need are images. Any kind of images - gardens, species rhododendrons, favourite hybrids, digital shots, slides, old snapshots from the shoebox. It turns out that it is far easier to make meaningful remarks about a number of images one already has, than it is to come up with some non-copyrighted pictures to go with whatever it was you wanted to say.

If we could build up a repository of decent photos for which we need not worry that the Intellectual Property Police were perusing our Newsletter, it would be, as they say, "a good thing".

I want to thank Mike T. for the help both offered and given, and on behalf of everyone in FSRS for shouldering this responsibility so well for so long.

Dibbles away!

Brenda Macdonald

Mike Trembath has forwarded this sad note from Don Smart regarding the recent loss of Betty Spady. The original obituary notice can be viewed on the website of the Statesman Journal of Salem Oregon, at <http://online.statesmanjournal.com/obituaries/obituary.cfm?i=14182>

Betty Jeane Worthey_Spady September 28, 1927 - November 10, 2002

SALEM - After an extended illness Betty Worthey Spady, 75, of Salem, quietly passed away at her home from pulmonary and cardiac complications of radiation treatment. She is survived by her husband, Dr. Herbert A. Spady, her children, their spouses and her 11 grandchildren.

Betty focused her time and energy on the development of her children, family, and the tending of a large property NE of Salem. She had a passion for gardening and often raised bumper crops. After their children left home Betty and Herb began to focus their horticultural interests in the development of the Honsuchachac Rhododendron Nursery and Garden, which they developed and ran for several years. Betty played key roles in the Portland Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society and in the development of the Willamette Chapter of ARS. She served that Willamette Chapter for over two decades. She served on numerous committees including the National Honors Committee and various Membership Committees, culminating as Public Relations Chairperson. She developed and edited the electronic Rhododendron and Azalea News for several years, and was awarded the ARS Gold Medal in 2001 for her service to that organization.

Up the Garden Path with Norma Senn

....MORE DOGWOODS OCTOBER 2002

When we think of dogwoods, we tend to think first of the lovely tree forms so well known here along the Pacific coast and in eastern North America. However, there are also several good species of shrubby dogwoods that can be used in gardens. They all have the advantage of being hardy, and relatively easy to grow. Most of the shrubby dogwoods have shade tolerance and fit in nicely with woodland gardens. Because they are easy to care for, they also are good choices for low maintenance gardens.

In British Columbia, there are two species of shrubby dogwoods that are readily found in garden centres: *Cornus alba*, the Tatarian or Siberian dogwood, and *Cornus stolonifera*, the Red Osier dogwood. Both grow as multi-stemmed, deciduous plants. They have clusters of small white flowers in mid to late spring, and are hardy into Zone 2.

The names for some of the dogwoods can be confusing.



Cornus alba 'Argenteo-marginata'

For example, *Cornus alba* 'Argenteo-marginata' is also called *Cornus elegantissima* or Cream-edge dogwood. Regardless of the name used, this is probably the most commonly planted shrubby dogwood in British Columbia. This particular form of Tatarian dogwood has bright red branches that make an excellent display in the winter landscape, and the

striking, variegated leaves make this plant a good choice to brighten up shady areas in summer. The plant easily reaches 1.5 meters in height, and it can have an equally large spread. There are other varieties of *C. alba*, for example, 'Spaethia' which has yellow edged leaves, *C. alba* 'Coral Beauty' which is a solid green leafed form with exceptionally fine red twig colouring, and *C. alba* 'Siberica' another variety which has brilliant red coloured branches.



While they are not produced in abundance, *C. alba* can have attractive white to bluish-white clusters of berries.

Plants of *C. stolonifera* (also known as *C. sericea*) are very similar in appearance to those of *C. alba*. However, this dogwood produces stolons, so it is capable of spreading to form a fairly large thicket of plants. Because of the spreading habit, it is frequently grown in areas where a hardy plant is needed to hold soil in place, for example along highway embankments. It is native to eastern North America, where it is found growing in areas with moist soils. Bark of *C. stolonifera* was used by natives to smoke pemmican.

C. stolonifera has very colourful bark in late winter as the sap begins to rise. As leaves appear though, the twig bark turns green. Frequently, the yellow-twigged form, *C. stolonifera* 'Flaviramea' is planted because it offers bright yellow twigs to the late winter landscape. A second variety is the dwarf, *C. stolonifera* 'Kelseyi'. This plant grows to about 60 cm tall. It produces stolons that will allow a single plant to spread to cover a fairly large area. It is occasionally used as a coarse-textured ground cover. I grow 'Kelseyi' as a ground cover in part of my own garden. I started with a plant in a 4" pot about 10 years ago, and it has spread to an area of about 15 square feet since then. I find that is the last of my shrubs to leaf out each spring. When I first grew it, I worried that it was not faring well. However, the late leafing out is typical of plants that are native to cold areas where late spring frosts are common. In some years 'Kelyseyi' has excellent fall colour, but at least for me, this isn't a consistent attribute.

My favourite shrubby dogwood is the Pagoda Dogwood, *Cornus alternifolia*. As the name suggests, this plant has an alternate leaf habit instead of the usual opposite pattern typical of most dogwoods. The common name, Pagoda Dogwood, refers to this plant's growth habit, not its country of origin (it is native to eastern North America). In time, it forms a large shrub with a strongly horizontal layered growth pattern, reminiscent of the stratified tiers found on

pagodas. This plant makes an excellent foundation shrub for buildings with large expanses of bare wall. Like the other shrubby dogwoods, this species should be grown in shady locations, preferably with cool, moist soils. It is a good choice for north sides of buildings. The Pagoda Dogwood has small clusters of white flowers in late May. While individual flowers are not showy, the clusters are borne on the upper sides of the branches and make a very attractive showing.

Pagoda Dogwoods can have good fall colour. This species is commonly grown in eastern Canada, but I have noticed it for sale occasionally in the south coastal area, so it's gradually becoming more available here.

The Gray Dogwood, *Cornus racemosa*, is another eastern North American native plant. It is found growing in drier areas than the species listed above, but it is able to withstand a wide range of soils and sites. Personally, I think the species listed above offer more landscape interest to local gardens than the Gray Dogwood, but this is a tough landscape plant and it is particularly good for screening purposes. It can be pruned easily to keep it full and in bounds. Like the other shrubby dogwoods, it has clusters of small white flowers in the spring. Birds like the white berries of the Gray Dogwood.

In addition to trees and shrubs, there is a gorgeous herbaceous dogwood groundcover, *Cornus canadensis* or Bunchberry, that can be found locally. This perennial plant grows throughout much of the coniferous forests

of northern Canada. It has emerald green leaves and in spring, each short upright stem is topped by a small white flower. The flower is very typical of the dogwoods, having four prominent bracts that surround the true flowers. When it's happy, Bunchberry will spread to form a superb ground cover. However, it can be fussy to transplant and get established. Recommendations are to plant it into a partially rotting stump or log, where there is still some bark

attached to the log and to grow well, it needs an evenly moist, light, well aerated, acid soil. I find it does well growing in the bark mulch I use as a mulch in the shady areas of my garden. It doesn't root deeply into the underlying soil, but stays mostly just in the mulch area, so I do make sure this area gets some water during the driest part of the summer.

Bunchberry gets its common name from the bright red berries borne on the stem tips in mid to late summer.



Fall Colour on shrubby Dogwood

on the stem tips in mid to late summer.

When I was a student, we were taught to try and use plants that offered at least two things to a garden. In the case of the dogwoods, they do more because they offer year-round garden interest.

Depending on the species chosen, they have lovely flowers, attractive fruits, fall colour and good winter bark interest. There are very hardy species available, and if planted in the right place, they are low maintenance. It just doesn't get any better.



COMPANION PLANTS

W is for Wisteria

Family: Fabaceae (formerly Leguminosae)

Is there ever a more lovely sight than the voluptuous trains of violet blooms of wisteria hanging gracefully from the roof of a white pergola? I think not! The delicate fragrance, the pastel colors, the sheer opulence of bloom, and the fine-textured pinnate foliage all combine to produce a climber of unsurpassed beauty. I must however insert a few words of caution here before you rush headlong out and purchase the first one you see. A bit of preparation is advisable to avoid disappointment. First off – this is a **STURDY** vigorous vine, and will scoff at any attempt to restrain it to a simple trellis!

You'll need a strong support – either an archway or pergola, a mature tree, or a well-built fence. Allow spaces for the stems to twine, as they do not adhere or cling. With some diligence you can even train it free-standing to a most elegant small tree. Choose a sunny site, prepare the soil with plenty of organic matter and ensure adequate drainage – its not greedy but doesn't like wet feet. Ask a few questions before purchasing – the best plants should be cutting grown. Grafted forms may develop a rootstock suckering problem, and seedlings take an endless time before blooming.

There are many named varieties available, mainly from the Chinese (*W. sinensis*) or the Japanese (*W. floribunda*) types; the main differences being the direction of twining of the stems, and the way the racemes open – all at once or from the bottom up. Choose from names such as Amethyst, Black Dragon, Blue Sapphire, Snow Showers, Issai, Lavender Lace, Caroline, Sierra Madre, Viola and Macrobotrys (the one with the really long blooms). Bloom colors vary from deep violet through mauves, lavenders and blues to white, some with yellow or white markings. The raceme can range from a chunky 9 inches to a stunning garland of 3 feet long! Seed can often develop after bloom in a fat green pod clothed in silvery velvet. Avoid consuming any parts of the plant though, as it will cause severe discomfort.

I have heard talk that some wisteria are shy bloomers. That may be so if you are unfortunate enough to have a seedling, or have it growing in too much shade or moisture, but all others should produce well. Shorten lank growths in winter to 8-12 inches – look for the bloom spurs, as they have nice fat buds. This treatment may also be repeated in August. Keep away high nitrogen foods or manures, and water only enough to sustain. Well established plants can easily tolerate lean conditions.

The wisteria takes a little longer to establish than other less woody vines such as Clematis or Honeysuckle, but your patience will be sumptuously rewarded for many years to come.

Wisteria sinensis (Chinese Wisteria) in Florida, where it is listed as a Category 2 invasive species,





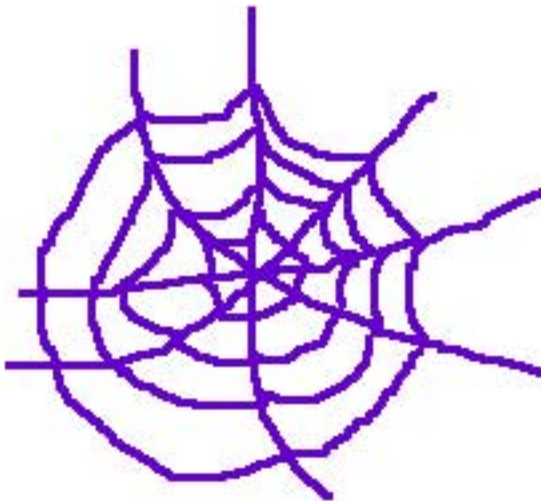
Rhododendron zoelleri is native to New Guinea, and its growing requirements are typical of the Vireyas. This species has no frost tolerance. It should be given excellent drainage and prefers an acid growing medium. The usual recommendations of good bright light and a 12 hour day, plus excellent relative humidity and good air movement apply to this species. Bovees Catalogue recommends grouping plants together or adding a small humidifier to the room or greenhouse where Vireyas are grown.

R. zoelleri is a tall, upright growing plant with lovely yellow to red/orange bi-coloured flowers. According to J. Kenyon and J. Walker, in Vireyas, A Practical Gardening Guide, this species has been found growing over a wide range of elevations along the northern coast of Papua New Guinea. Its adaptability has made it popular with Vireya hybridizers.

For those of us who attended the recent western regional conference in Bellingham, Bovees Nursery treated us to a display of lovely Vireyas. If you have a good bright sunny window or greenhouse, I recommend you try at least a couple of Vireya species or hybrids

Norma Senn

Hanging Round the Web



Hennings Rhododendron & Azaleas Pages - links to everywhere!
<http://www.users.fast.net/~shenning/rhody.html>

Meerkerkgarden - a nicely laid out reminder of our bus tour two years ago
www.meerkerkgardens.org/

Societe Bretonne du Rhododendrons - an amazing site. They have even added a file on mole control (see this issue's *Rootstalk*)
<http://perso.wanadoo.fr/s.b.r./indexgb.htm>

ARS - Massachusetts Chapter
www.rosebay.org/chapterweb/index.html

Sean Rafferty



A few years ago I recommended the ultimate solution for the problem of moles. Rather than becoming apoplectic at the appearance of a huge mole hill in the middle of the manicured lawn and then rushing around implementing ineffective solutions, I advocated that the gardener should learn to live with the little furry creatures. Moles may eat worms and other good things but they also eat nasty grubs and insects. They do not eat bulbs contrary to popular myth. They also improve the growing conditions by turning over the soil and enhance the drainage by excavating tunnels.

That was then. This is now. What has changed is that we have developed an elaborate rock garden on a slope with delicate cushion plants, carefully mulched with elegant stone chips. Rock gardeners refer to this type of planting as a bunnery. Mr. Mole decided that he would develop a complex labyrinth beneath the bunnery and daylight his tunnels in the cracks between the rocks. With gravity assisting the removal of tunnel spoil, it was a tunneller's paradise. Tiny plants were uprooted and there was an ever-increasing cascade of dirt piles over the carefully washed stone mulch.

There are very few options to get rid of moles. They only eat living things so they will not take bait. Smoke canisters are useless as the mole escapes too quickly and closes off the tunnel behind. The only way to remove them is by trapping. However, setting traps in a rock garden is virtually impossible.

The solution was to make the tunnels in the rock garden temporarily unpleasant to use by using smoke canisters, available at your friendly garden centre. The battle plan was to drive the mole to a location where trapping would be feasible. Every time a spoil heap was constructed in the rock garden I scraped away the mound of soil to find the tunnel, lit the fuse of a smoke canister and poked it in the hole. Eventually, the activity in the rock garden ceased and mole hills started to appear in the grass path above. To avoid a repeat performance, the next step was to find out how to trap moles.

This was the hardest part of the campaign. The traps you can buy locally are very wimpy and it is hard to imagine that they would ever be effective. Victor brand scissor traps can be purchased at a farmer's coop in Bellingham, which are to the locally available traps, what a shovel is to a teaspoon. There is really no comparison. The way they work is ingenious but the setting has to be meticulous and requires considerable patience. The first step is to find an active tunnel by digging down in likely locations, typically between mole hills. The final dug hole must be the exact width of the trap. The scissors of the trap are set across the tunnel entrances at either end of the dug hole and the spring release of the trap is placed on a mound of soil in the centre of the hole. The hole is then back-filled with soil burying the trap completely unless the tunnel is shallow in which case the trap protrudes slightly above the ground. When, and if, the mole shows up, he feels the way ahead is blocked and starts to excavate a tunnel through the blocked section. The action of tunneling pushes the soil up against the trap spring release.

For construction of a new section of rock garden there are ways to discourage mole activity. I have buried galvanized wire mesh with half-inch spacing, at key locations where tunnel outlets could be formed.

The village molecatcher used to be a fixture in rural England in the 19th century and was known for his cunning and guile. It is surprising they thought it necessary to catch moles in those days unless they were under the misapprehension that moles were bad for the garden. On the other hand, perhaps they had the same obsessions with unsightly mole hills that we have today