The Yak

Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society

Volume 16 Number 10 December 2003

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

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

www.flounder.ca/frasersouth

2003 Officers

President:	Mike Bale 604-853-8839
Vice Pres.:	Colleen Forster 604-534-1840
Secretary:	Wendy Sellars 604-535-0763
Treasurer:	Trevor Badminton 604-856-0046
Directors:	Dalen Bayes Norma Senn Harold Fearing
Membership:	Wenonah March
Newsletter:	Brenda Macdonald 604-990-5353 macdobr@shaw.ca

This Month's Meeting: Wednesday, December 17, 2003

EARLY - at 6:00pm

The Annual Christmas Party

... good food, good company, good times!

Quick Hits

Welcome! to our newest members:
Meg Brown, of Vancouver
Mike Kenderes, of Surrey
Gaeton Myer, of Surrey

Christmas Party Bring something to contribute to the potluck dinner, and some eating utensils and dishes so you can try everyone else's contributions. Also, a gift valued under $10.00 to exchange. Don't forget the meeting starts earlier than usual - at 6:00pm .

Survey Look to the last page of this month's Yak for your chance to voice your opinion, help the Chapter to grow, develop, and satisfy your long-felt wants, and qualify for the special Survey-Completers Draw.

From the President

Christmas Party

It's time to put on your Christmas togs (you know, the sweatshirt with the Santa painted on the front) and come to the annual FSRS Christmas Pot Luck Extravaganza. Bring something to eat which can be shared, your own plates, mugs, and cutlery, and a fun gift (value under $10.00) to be exchanged. Unfortunately David Sellars was called away to England unexpectedly and we will not be able to reprise last year's "Species and Hybrids" tournament, but I am confident we will be able to amuse ourselves anyway.

George Fraser 150th Anniversary Celebration

Bill Dale is organizing a special celebration for the George Fraser 150th Anniversary Celebration at Ucluelet on May 29th, 2004, and has extended an invitation to all FSRS members. Among the dignitaries who have indicated their intention to attend are Iona Campagnola, Lieutenant Governor of BC, and Mike Stewart, President of the ARS.

Sinogrande Seeds

Many thanks are due to Ken Gibson for his distribution of the *R. sinogrande* seeds from his garden. We anticipate a forest of *R. sinogrande* in the Fraser Valley in about ten years!

RSF Plant Sales

The Rhododendron Species Foundation has made arrangements for the delivery of plants to UBC, as mentioned in last month's newsletter. Copies of the current RSF plant catalogue will be available at the Christmas party. Individuals can purchase as few as one or two plants, and arrange to pick them up atUBC.

Vireyas

This month's edition of the RHS Bulletin has a four-page article praising the virtues of vireyas. This appears to be a well-written article, and photocopies will be made available for anyone who may be interested.

Ted Van Veen

We were all saddened to learn of the passing of Ted Van Veen on Saturday, December 6th. Ted was one of the gentle giants in the field of rhododendrons, and has many credits to his name, both professionally and personally. He has been a distinguished member of many horticultural societies, and his enthusiasm for rhododendrons has played a major role in the success of the A.R.S. organization. He is the recipient of two Bronze awards from the Portland Chapter, and a Gold Medal from the A.R.S. He was the author of "Rhododendrons in America" and also authored "Rhododendrons You Should Meet" in 1995. He was instrumental in getting the "Pacific Coast Rhododendron Story" published, and was co-founder and promoter of the Crystal Springs Garden in Portland. His nursery is known world wide. Many of us had the very special pleasure of meeting with him earlier this year when he conducted our group through the Crystal Springs Garden, sharing with us his immense pride in the beauty and tranquility of the garden. I personally recall some of his anecdotes and his joy in recognizing much of the wildlife visiting the garden at that time. We send our sincerest condolences and thoughts to his wife Fran, daughters Kathy and Diane, and grandchildren.

Companion Plants

H is for Heuchera
the Saxifrage Family
Family: Saxifragaceae

In a world where we seem to be placing more and more emphasis on bigger, more colourful, and more unusual flowers, it's nice to see a genus that truly exemplifies the term "foliage plant". Coral Bells, alternately known as Coral Flower and Alum Root, has become one of the hottest plants on the market today, and for very good reasons. First, their hardiness to Zone 3 or 4 extends their appeal right across the country. Not surprising, since many of the 55 or so species are native to the Rockies. Second, the blooms, often bright and fragrant, are a magnet for bees and butterflies. And third, the foliage variations

Heuchera 'Snowstorm'

Heuchera 'Green Finch'

Heuchera 'Chocolate Ruffles'

selected even in the last five years are almost overwhelming – ruffles, contrast veining, scallops, metallics, and more. I must make a confession though– up until a few years ago, I thought these plants were boring, with ugly mottled leaves and unassuming flowers. I think it must have been a clump if H. 'Palace Purple' in the winter, when everything around it was dull and bare, and the glossy purple leaves just lit up the rockery, that I changed my mind. Despite this change of heart however, I think that some varieties still have ugly leaves and boring flowers, but that's just me !!

Among the myriad of hybrids and selections, it's hard not to be attracted to such imaginative names as Pewter Moon, Chocolate Ruffles, Cherry Splash, Amber Waves, Rain of Fire, Snowstorm or Velvet Night. I give full marks to plant names that conjure up such yummy mental pictures. Do your shopping in the summer to see the combinations of blooms and foliages together. Blooms appear all summer from May to July, and even though the leaves are evergreen, they are at their best in the growing season. Choose a site in sun or partial shade, with moist but drainable soil, fertile, with a neutral pH. The smaller varieties do well in containers and rockeries. After 3 years or so, the crowns will extend above ground, so in late summer you should lift the clumps, pull off the well-rooted sections and replant at the proper level.

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The small blooms appear well above the foliage in branched panicles, and come in all shades of reds and pinks, plus white, cream and lime green. For some, they seem almost superfluous, since the foliage is so dramatic on its own. The size of plants varies from a robust 30x30 inches, like Coral Cloud, Firefly, Greenfinch, Oakington Jewel, and Scintillation, to diminutive cuties like Plum Pudding, Pretty Polly, Taft's Joy and Siskyou Mountains.

Use Heucheras in mixed borders or as edging to shrub beds – the multitude of variegation and leaf shapes contrasts so well with the plain, often coarse leaves of rhodos and the like, and the blooms come when most of the spring bloomers are finished. Just remember to sprinkle a little dolomite lime on them periodically to keep the soil from getting too acidic. Try not to get too attached to any particular one though, because in 6 months time you'll fall in love with an exciting new variety (look for the new 'Planet Collection' coming out now) and heaven knows, you don't have room for them all . Do you??

Happy Planting *Colleen Forster*

Heuchera 'Firefly'

Heuchera 'Amber Waves'

Heuchera 'Pewter Moon'

Chris Klapwijk, who handles the FSRS website, has forwarded a request he has received from Mike Creel of Columbia, South Carolina. Mr. Creel is the Senior News Writer of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, and is credited with discovering the newest rhododendron species, *R. eastmanii.*

(Chris notes that Mr. Creel has forwarded a significant amount of information about a low-cost, highly effective propagation method, information which Chris hopes to post to our website in the near future.)

At present, however, Mr. Creel is not far from developing a yellow-flowered evergreen azalea. He is trying to grow as many good, yellow, deciduous azaleas as he can, to use for hybridizing with good, white, evergreen azaleas.

The yellows he is looking for are:

- Arpege
- Nancy Waterer
- Sunlit Grace

If you have any of the above hybrids, or know of someone who does, please let Chris know so he can arrange to send cuttings down to South Carolina.

From the Editor

Last Month:

Susan Murray's presentation on Heritage Trees of the Fraser Valley provided us with a fascinating and welcome touch of local history. We are all looking forward to the long-awaited publication of her book.

And, on behalf of all of us who indulge so regularly and so well at the tea and coffee break, I would like to thank the usual kitchen stalwarts of Mary Anne and Wendy et al, as well as Henriette and Joan and others for their delicious baking

This Month:

Our fabulous Christmas Pot Luck Dinner! We couldn't manage it without Sue Klapwijk's yeoman's effort of organization and coordination. We all owe her an enormous thank you, and promise to save her the wish-bone.

Next Month:

January's meeting will be the Second Annual "AGM and Dessert Meeting", possibly to be renamed as the Leigh Mikitka Challenge Evening. The business of the evening is the Annual General Meeting, with the election of the new executives and directors. And, in order to make the evening more palatable (no pun intended) we all bring a dessert of some sort, and take frequent tea and coffee breaks while proceeding with the necessary business of the Chapter. Further entertainment is provided by short presentations of members' slides. All Chapter members are welcome to bring in slides to show.

The Business:

For the November Directors/Executive meeting, President Mike Bale drew up some documentation on the various activities and duties which must be accomplished, and to which members of the board these duties should fall, in order for the Chapter to function well. Although these are only guidelines which the new executive will have to review and endorse, it was very helpful for Mike to have thought so carefully about our Chapter, even at the point at which he has almost resigned his responsibility for it.

The other document which Mike proposed was a questionnaire which could be sent out to recently lapsed members, noting that we were sorry to lose their support and inquiring whether there was anything we could have done differently which would have encouraged them to stay on as members.

We all agreed that this was a good idea, and moreover, that it would be as well to ask our current members the same question: "Is there anything else we can do, or something we are already doing that we could do differently, that would make the Chapter more responsive to your needs?"

Hence, the survey.

It is attached as the last page to this month's Yak, as a separate page so you can remove it without losing any other parts of the newsletter.

Fill it out, bring it to the Christmas meeting (or mail it in if you are unable to attend) and help us to build a better, stronger Chapter.

N.b. All those who complete the questionnaire and bring it to me at the Christmas Party will indeed be eligible for the special "Survey Draw", which promises a prize of unknown content but doubtlessly inestimable value.

Brenda Macdonald

Up the Garden Path with Norma Senn

Chocolate December 2003

You can tell when it's the holiday season by the numbers of television commercials for chocolates. This wonderful food has been cultivated for several thousands of years in Central and South America. It is derived from the fermented seeds of the cacao tree, *Theobroma cacao*. While native to the New World, about 70% of the world's chocolate is now grown in Africa, particularly in areas like the Ivory Coast and Cameroon.

Chocolate was highly valued by the Mayans and Aztecs who used it as both a spice and drink. It was introduced to Europe in the 16th century, first going to Spain but gradually spreading throughout western Europe. According to one historical source, the use of chocolate got a boost in popularity when Pope Pius V declared that drinking chocolate did not break religious fasts. During the 17th century, chocolate houses were common in many parts of Europe, since by the middle of that century, prices for chocolate drinks had dropped enough to allow them to become a popular treat by the middle classes. At first, chocolate beans were simply ground up and used without any further refinement, resulting in bitter pastes. Gradually though, flavoring ingredients like vanilla and cinnamon were added. Then, in 1828, The Dutch invented the process of making cocoa powder, and hot chocolate drinks, as we know them today, were created.

By 1850, the Joseph Fry Company had invented the process of mixing melted cocoa butter with Dutch cocoa powder to make the pressed chocolate which became the first chocolate bars. This process led to the development of companies like Cadbury's in England and Hershey's in the United States. Both these companies were formed by men who, for religious reasons, abstained from alcohol but believed that chocolate was an acceptable substitute. These companies, along with many others, developed and continue to produce the wide variety of wonderful chocolates so many of us love.

Theobroma cacao flowers

All chocolate starts with the seeds of the cacao tree. In the wild, this small tree grows as an under-story tree in areas with even soil moisture. It needs a true tropical climate where the temperature never drops below 15°C and adequate moisture is

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Theobroma cacao
pods on tree

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received year-round. The flowers and then the fruits form directly on the main stem of the tree. The white flowers can be produced at any time of the year, and this is one of those unusual plants that bears both flowers and fruits in varying stages of ripening year round. The fruit pods take between 5 to 8 months to ripen. Because there may be only one or two ripe pods on a given tree at any one time, workers need to go back to each tree regularly to individually harvest the ripe fruit. This is one reason why the fruits have to be harvested by hand.

In the wild, the cacao tree is pollinated by small midges and occasionally by bats. Flowers require cross-pollination, where pollen must come from different varieties of cacao trees. The entire pollination process in chocolate plantations is problematic because growers want to grow large tracts of just a few selected varieties of chocolate trees. But the more variability there is in tree varieties, the better the pollination. As well, the midges do best when they have a wide selection of plant materials to live in and feed on. In large chocolate plantations, plant species other than cacao trees are often removed so there are few alternate hosts for the midges, and this affects pollination. One of the solutions proposed to solve the pollination problem is to plant smaller groves of cacao trees, and to increase the numbers of varieties planted in one location. Of course, this is not as economically efficient as growing large numbers of trees in a single tract.

Cacao flowers (which are about the size of a nickel) and the seed pods that result if they are fertilized, grow directly off the trunk of the tree. Botanists call this pattern "cauliflory." Europeans had never seen such a thing, and usually "corrected" drawings of the tree by moving the cacao pods out onto the smaller branches. Scientists theorize that the arrangement of flowers right off the trunk might facilitate pollination by small, moisture-loving insects, especially ants and flies associated with leaf litter.

With ripening, the green seed pods gradually turn yellow, orange, red or purple. For good flavored chocolate, the pods must be allowed to ripen completely before harvest. Once ripened, the fruit can remain on the tree for a couple of weeks. Since the fruit is located directly on the tree trunk, the fruits have to be carefully harvested by hand to protect potential growth buds.

While we make chocolate from the seeds, the fruit pulp is also edible. It is supposed to have a mild, slightly tart taste, somewhat like that of a mango. After harvest, the pods are split open and the seeds removed. Each pod can have between 20 to 60 seeds. The seeds are

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surrounded by a sweet, mucilaginous material which needs to be broken down during fermentation. It is the fermentation process, where over a 10 day period the seeds reach a temperature of about 50°C, that converts the tough, bitter tasting seeds into palatable cocoa beans. After this fermentation, the seeds are washed, dried, packed for shipping and sent to processing plants around the world.

In processing, the cocoa beans are ground, toasted and crushed. The seed coats and embryos are removed, and then the chocolate is either made into bars, or separated into cocoa butter and powder. Additional flavoring agents and sugars are added at the last stage of processing. It takes about 80 fermented seeds to make a 100g chocolate bar. A milk chocolate bar is made from less than half that number of seeds. In areas where cocoa beans are processed, the spent seed coats, or cocoa hulls, are often available for use as a garden mulch. When first spread they still have a faint fragrance of chocolate, which must make a pleasant addition to the garden.

If you're a chocolate lover, you are probably aware that the price of chocolates has risen steadily over the last ten years. This is due to the increasing consumption of chocolates around the world. As well, the chocolate makers have agreed that in order to call a product "pure chocolate," the product must contain at least 70% chocolate. This has also contributed to the price increase.

As far as I'm concerned, chocolate is one of the basic food groups, so it is nice to know that it does have some beneficial health properties. It contains theobromine, which is considered to be a mild stimulant somewhat like caffeine, as well as some anti-oxidants And in moderation, the cocoa butter is considered a good source of energy. So, enjoy your holiday chocolates without guilt, and best wishes to you all for a joyous holiday season. *Norma Senn*

Theobroma cacao
ripened pods

ROOTSTALK

BY

INDUMENTUM

It's that time of year when Indumentum comes up with recommendations for stocking stuffers. Though I usually like to think I am contrary to consumer trends it is probably time you bought a digital camera for that gardener in your life. Many gardeners like photography. It is enjoyable to record the progress of your garden and to take happy snaps during garden visits. Last Christmas my stocking was stuffed with a digital camera and ever since I have discovered the previously unknown delights of digital photography.

There are the obvious advantages of a 'film-less' camera which allows you to take as many pictures as you like as long as you have enough storage space in your camera and can periodically clear out the memory by down-loading the pictures to your computer. With a relatively inexpensive colour printer you can print out your own pictures or have them printed by taking a CD of the photos (or e-mailing them) to a commercial developer.

The photo dimensions are different to a conventional camera and are basically 4 units long and 3 units high. If you want satisfactory print quality up to a print size of 4 inches by 3 inches, you only need a 'one Mega pixel camera'. If you want good print quality up to a print size of 8 inches by 6 inches you would need a 'five Mega pixel camera'. Of course you don't have to print the pictures at all. You can view them on a computer or on your TV, using a DVD player that can read a photo CD. Storage of photos is much easier as they can all be stored as electronic files which means less clutter in the cupboard (but potentially more clutter on your hard drive).

A digital camera is much lighter than a conventional camera so it is easy to carry and you are more likely to have it with you at that key photographic moment. But the most surprising thing that we discovered is that, for the same depth of field (range of sharpness) as a conventional camera, the aperture setting is four times larger. This is very significant for someone like me who has been lugging a tripod around for years, even up mountains for alpine flower photography. For taking images of flowers you need a good depth of field to get most of the flower in focus, especially for close-ups. I use a tripod so that I can get a better depth of field by reducing the aperture size which requires a correspondingly slower shutter speed. At slow shutter speeds, the tripod is required to eliminate camera shake. With the digital camera, I can now get a satisfactory depth of field with an f-stop of F8 whereas a conventional camera would require an aperture setting of F32 for the same depth of field. However, the F8 setting requires a shutter speed of 1/125, easily fast enough for hand-held work. Under the same lighting conditions, a conventional camera with an f-stop of F32 would require a shutter speed of 1/30 which is definitely tripod territory. Curiously this tremendous advantage of digital cameras is not prominent in any promotional literature that I have seen. The advantage factor varies depending on the make of digital camera purchased. Ask your dealer about it and see if he knows what you're talking about!

The reasons for the improved depth of field with digital cameras are quite complex and involve something called 'circles of confusion'. I am not making this up. But to explain it would get too confusing and circular and we are getting to the end of the page. If you need to know more, you can always look it up on the Internet using Google. Anyone interested in a second-hand tripod?

December 2003 FSRS Survey

Please rate the FSRS activities on a scale of 1 (terrible) to 5 (excellent):

1) Programme and speakers _____

2) Reception, refreshments, and camaraderie _____

3) Garden tours and visits _____

4) Christmas party _____

5) June picnic _____

6) Newsletter _____

7) Availability and cost of plants _____

8) Location, day, and time of meeting _____

9) Communication by executives/directors _____

10) Membership costs _____

Suggestions: Speaker Topics/Activities/Other

_____

_____

_____

_____

Frustrations:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Deliver your COMPLETED survey to Brenda
at the Christmas party
and receive a ticket ELIGIBLE for the exclusive
SURVEY-COMPLETION PRIZE DRAW